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Action Stories of All Kinds

ARGOSY

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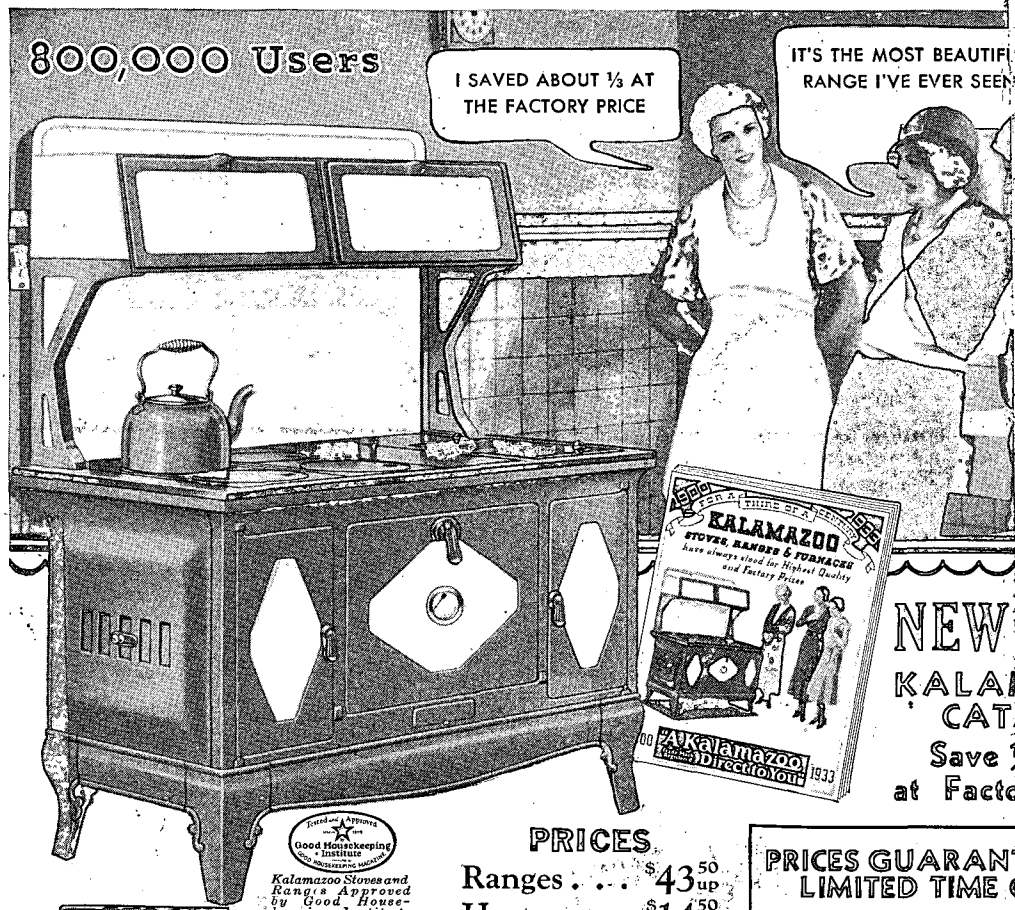
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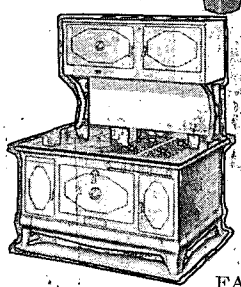

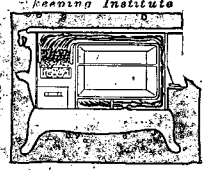

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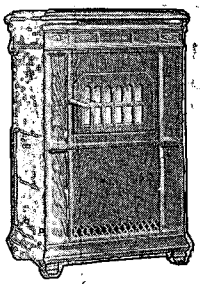

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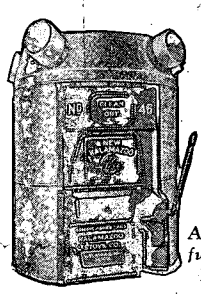

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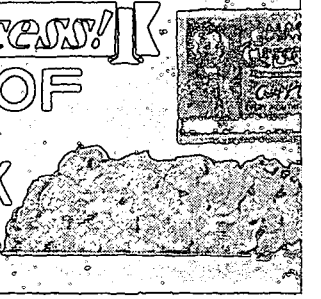

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Action Stories of Every Variety

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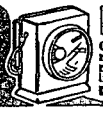

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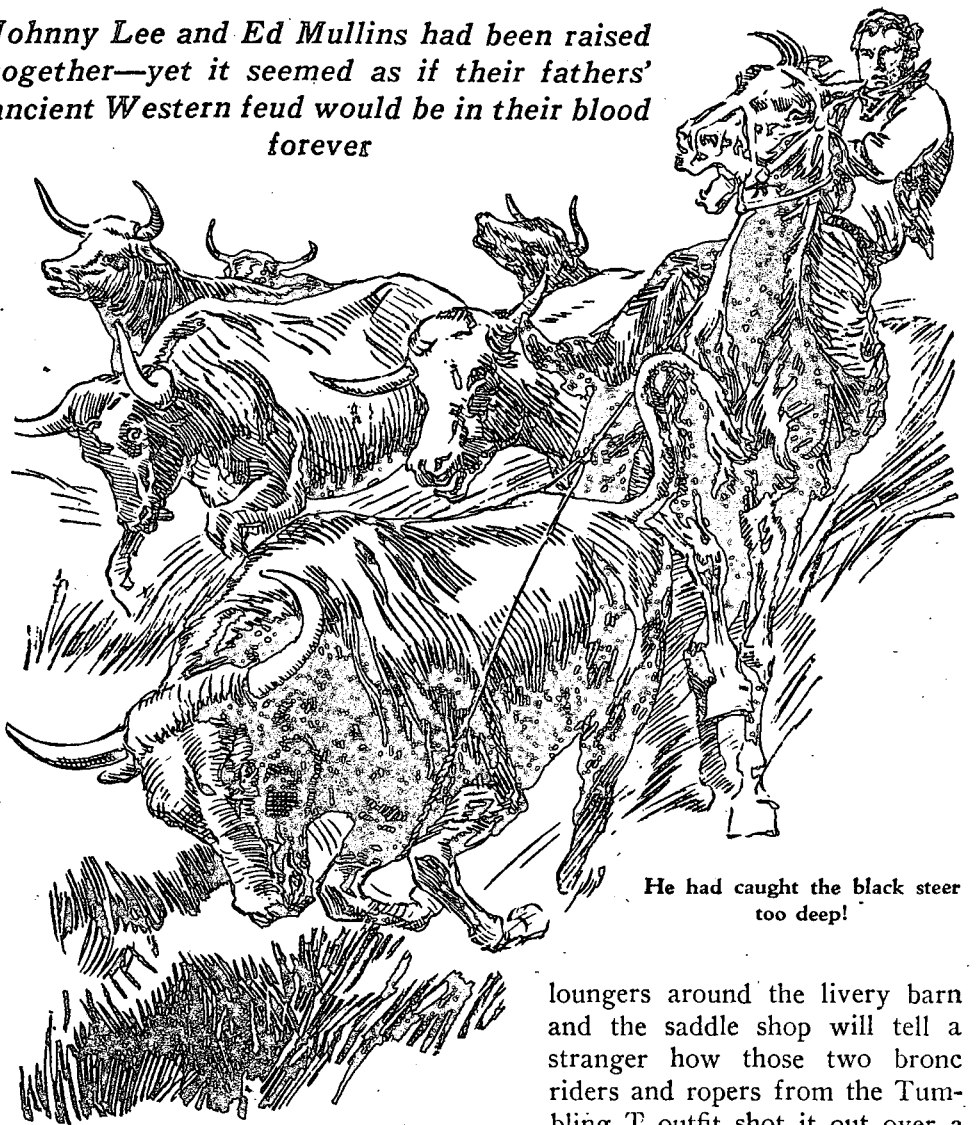
Sons of Gun Fighters

By WALT COBURN

Author of "The Peace Treaty of the Seven-Up," etc.

Johnny Lee and Ed Mullins had been raised together—yet it seemed as if their fathers' ancient Western feud would be in their blood forever



He had caught the black steer too deep!

CHAPTER I.

AN OLD FEUD.

THERE in the little Arizona cow town of Coyote they like to talk about that gun fight between Johnny Lee and Ed Mullins. The loungers around the livery barn and the saddle shop will tell a stranger how those two bronc riders and ropers from the Tumbling T outfit shot it out over a measly Mexican peso. You can get the story from any one of twenty or thirty men who witnessed the fight, and their tales will vary only in minor details, such as the number of shots fired and who fired the first shot. Also how one of Johnny's bullets smashed

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a watch in Ed's pocket—a watch he'd won at the Prescott Frontier Days show for bulldogging—and how one of Ed's bullets hit the big square belt buckle Johnny had won in the calf tying at the Calgary Stampede. And they will start the yarn, each and every one of those yarn spinners, with that Mexican peso being pitched at a mark.

Old Uncle Joe Parbury, who owns the Tumbling T outfit, knows better. He could prove them all wrong if he wanted to spill the facts, but Uncle Joe doesn't talk. Especially about those two boys he raised from kids, there at the ranch. Johnny Lee and Ed Mullins, both about the same age, had been orphaned by the most bitterly fought cattle war in the Southwest. And Uncle Joe Parbury had taken the two young 'uns and cared for them. Joe Parbury had taken his part in that old cattle war. He had fought with the law that put an end to the bloody fighting. As United States marshal he had pinned on his badge, strapped on his guns, and after months of hard riding and fast gun throwing, had put an end to the war between the Lees and the Pat Mullins factions.

But not before the cattle war had left two small boys orphans. Those two youngsters were Johnny Lee and Ed Mullins. Sons of enemies, Joe Parbury had adopted them, after a fashion. He hoped to thus cement a friendship between the two small boys that would be stronger than the hatred of their dead fathers. For in his own way Joe Parbury was something of an idealist, a dreamer.

Joe Parbury, when the war was ended, turned in his badge and moved from Texas to Arizona with the two small boys. He had money saved up. Land and cattle were cheap. So he settled at the head of Coyote Creek and started in the cattle business. He had carried half a dozen bullet scars out of the war, down in Texas; and he had enough of gun fighting, he said as he put away his guns. A tall, blue eyed, soft voiced man was Joe Parbury. And as the years whitened his black hair and mustache, he became Uncle Joe to everybody who knew him.

As different as day from midnight, Johnny Lee and Ed Mullins. Johnny was tall and long muscled, with dark brown eyes and wiry black hair. He seldom smiled, hardly ever laughed. Ed Mullins was short and stocky, with curly red hair and freckled hands and Irish blue eyes that laughed when his wide mouth spread in a quick grin. He made friends quickly, was intensely loyal, and quick to use his fists in defense of a friend. He was always the first to shake hands, win or lose, with any man he fought. He had a habit of crying when he fought. A queer mixture of gentleness and ferocity, Ed Mullins.

Johnny Lee, on the other hand, was slow to anger. He would walk away from a brawl. Even when he quarreled he was calm, cold eyed, cool tongued. And he never forgave an enemy.

Uncle Joe Parbury raised them. He taught them to ride and rope and handle cattle, and he sent them to school in the winter time. Even when they were small, they had been taught how to cook and to take care of themselves. So it was that Uncle Joe bought a small house in town and the two boys bached there, doing their own cooking, washing their own clothes, each doing his share of the chores. At odd intervals, when he could get away from the ranch, Uncle Joe would visit them. Sometimes he'd stay a week or two. Other times only a few hours.

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The town of Coyote knew the history of the cattle war; the Lees on one side, Pat Mullins and his cowboys on the other. And to a man they predicted that some day Joe Parbury would deeply regret the fact that he had adopted the two boys and tried to bring them up together.

YEARS slipped by. Manhood came quickly to the two boys. Still nothing happened. Even the men who spent their waking hours at the livery barn or the saddle shop began to think that, after all, Uncle Joe Parbury had made the right move when he took over the two boys. Because wherever you saw one of the young cowboys, the other would not be far away.

"Uncle Joe must be right," they decided, and let it go at that. Anyway, it was Joe Parbury's doin's, not theirs.

During the summer time, when school was out, the boys closed up the house in town, saddled their private horses, and headed for the ranch. Blood brothers could not have gotten along better. And their loyalty and devotion to Uncle Joe became a byword in that part of the cow country.

Only, Uncle Joe Parbury now knew what nobody else suspected: that he had made a terrible mistake. He first suspected it when, one night, he had showed up at the cabin in town. That was when the two boys were still in grammar school. He found them in their beds, Johnny with a black eye and bruised knuckles, young Ed with his nose swollen and his lips bruised.

It was typical of Uncle Joe Parbury that he had asked neither of the boys a single question. He had brought in some jerky and quail from the ranch, and together they had cooked a midnight feed of quail. Then Ed brought out a battered guitar and sang some Mexican songs which he had picked up somewhere or other. Johnny showed his guardian the new ice box which he had made himself.

But Uncle Joe's keen eyes had seen the blood spots in the front room, on the rug and the wall, and the fact that two chairs had been broken and carefully mended.

Uncle Joe Parbury rode back to the ranch the next day. He was worried a little. But when the boys came out to the ranch a few weeks later they were like brothers.

TWICE, in the next two years, Johnny and Ed showed the unmistakable marks of having been in a fight. No questions from Uncle Joe. No sort of explanation from either of the two boys.

Then school was over for good and they came out to the ranch. It was Joe Parbury's boast that Johnny and Ed were the two fastest cowboys in the rough country.

Uncle Joe Parbury ran two outfits. One at the head of Coyote Creek, and the other over in Black Basin. Johnny Lee was ramrod for the Coyote Creek spread, while Ed Mullins handled the outfit in Black Basin. Rough country, all of it. Just as rough as ever bothered a wild cowboy. Branding mavericks, doctoring cattle for screw worms, roping out wild steers that were led down from the mountains into small pastures called traps. Renegade steers that had been outlawed years ago. There was a standing contest between the two outfits to see who would catch the most outlawed steers.

Those spotted, off-colored Mexican steers that made their home in the rough country were wild as mountain sheep. It took a real cowboy who

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knew the range and the ways of wild cattle to out-fox one of those big, long-horned steers. It took fast horses. It took a man with reckless courage, and a horse with sure feet and a brave heart.

"Bet that bay bronc of mine, Johnny, against that sorrel yuh like so much, that I'll ketch more wild cattle than you do."

"I'm callin' that, Ed." Johnny's soft voice, his tight-lipped smile, contrasted with the hoo-rawing, wide-mouthed grin of the fun loving Ed Mullins.

Uncle Joe Parbury was too stove-up to ride much. He spent his time at the ranch, riding a big fat biscuit-loving horse he called Sour Dough. He smiled a little when the two young cowboys made their bet. But behind that smile was buried a foreboding of trouble that would keep him awake that night after the two outfits had left the home ranch.

The ranch house was a rambling, one story log building comprised of a big living room and a store room where saddles and chaps and pack-saddles and all kinds of camp litter were kept. Johnny and Ed had each cut off three ropes from the burlap-wrapped bale of hard-twist Manila rope.

"Bet a hat, Johnny," grinned Ed, "that I stretch one of these on Black Jack."

"And I'm callin' that 'un, cowboy!"

Black Jack was a big black Mexican steer that ranged in the junipers and pines between the head of Coyote Creek and Black Basin. He was one of the several renegade steers whose notoriety had won him a name. Few men had ever come close enough to the big black steer to swing a loop at his unsawed horns. Many a cowboy and horse had been crippled trying to rope him.

"If you young boneheads would spend more time gatherin' mavericks instead of holdin' ropin' contests up yonder, this outfit would make a little money."

But there was a twinkle in Uncle Joe's blue eyes when he spoke. Only his crippled legs and the burden of years kept him from being one of them, up there in the rough country.

"I'll fetch yuh in the tips of that black renegade's horns," promised Ed Mullins.

Johnny Lee made no reply, as he examined the short de-horning saw he was taking. Ed winked at Uncle Joe Parbury and grinned. Johnny Lee was one of those men who never hooraw, and who don't like to be hoorawed. But afterward, Uncle Joe remembered the smoldering blaze in Johnny Lee's dark eyes.

CHAPTER II.

NO DICE.

THE two outfits had been out a week. Now and then they sighted one another as they worked up into the rough country, up where the cattle were wild, where there were bowlders and brush and trees, and where the twisting trails were hard to follow. Black Jack's range.

It started to rain during the night and the dawn that followed was gray, cheerless, filled with a cold drizzle. There was mud underfoot, and the mountain tops were blanketed by a thick, white fog that was drifting lower.

The cook moved his fire in under a makeshift tarpaulin lean-to. The open fire was the one cheerful thing, there

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in that gray dawn. It was the rainy season, and every cowboy had his little one-man teepee.

Ed Mullins was the first of the cowboys to wake up. He pulled on his boots and hat and joined the cook, there beside the fire. The coffee had come to a boil in its big black pot, and was now simmering. Ed washed his hands and face and filled a big cup full of the strong black coffee.

"Great mornin' fer ducks, Ed," volunteered the cook.

"But not so good for the cowboy."

"Meanin' it'll be hard to locate that Black Jack steer?"

"Meanin' just that.—And pushin' a pony off the slants when the ground is wet ain't comical." He squatted on his heels, scowling into the rain.

"I got ten dollars bet with Johnny's cook that you ketch that big black outlaw. And every cowboy in the outfit is bettin' likewise. You'll snare him this trip."

Ed Mullins grinned over his coffee cup. The loyalty of his men was flattering. There was always a certain good-natured rivalry between the two outfits.

The cook lifted the lid of the Dutch oven and nodded approval at the biscuits that were browning. Meat sizzled in bacon grease. Brown beans and spuds were hot.

"Come an' git 'er," he bawled, "or I'll throw 'er away!"

Cowboys came piling out of their teepees. They cussed the rain and the fog. This was dangerous country, even in dry weather. Dangerous to run a horse down the steep slopes at any time; and with the trails slippery, it was ten times more dangerous. Now there was added to that danger the discomfort of riding in the rain. The country was too brushy to permit a man to wear a slicker. In half an hour they would be soaked to the skin.

Now, as they filled plates and cups, there came the sound of horse bells. The nighthawk was fetching in the remuda. There was something eerie, spooky, about the sound of those bells. At least it struck Ed Mullins that way. The fog had dropped lower, hiding all but the floor of the Black Basin.

The musical jingle of the horse bells came closer. Then, as if by some trick of magic, the horses showed coming out of the fog and rain.

Ed Mullins buckled on his chaps and buttoned his brush worn jumper. He was the first man at the brush corral. Mud up to a man's ankles, there in the corral. Wet ropes, stiff as steel cables. Ed roped his top horse, a fleabitten gray called Lizard. Lizard was a good horse in the mud.

Wet ropes. Wet saddles. Horses with cold humps in their back. Cowboys with soggy cigarettes. Hat brims dripping.

Ed Mullins forced a grin as he stepped aboard his horse and jerked his hat brim down across his eyes. "Let's go, cowboys!" he called, and scattered his riders in pairs.

By the time he had reached the upper country, where he figured he might jump Black Jack, he was riding alone. He was cold and wet; his hands were stiff and numb. But he hardly felt the discomfort. Peering into the fog, it seemed to him that it had become thicker than ever.

THEN, so suddenly that it left the cowboy momentarily dazed, a little bunch of cattle broke out of the brush. Brush cracked as they broke into a run.

Ed Mullins gave a choked cry of surprise. In that brief moment, as the

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little bunch of cattle showed in the open, he had spotted the big black renegade steer that every cowboy in the country had tried to snare. Black Jack!

Ed Mullins jerked at his rope strap as he touched Lizard's ribs with his spurs. But the game-hearted gray gelding was already under way—twisting, dodging among the bowlders and trees. Ed, his loop built, threw it back across his shoulder to keep it from fouling in the brush.

Lizard took a short cut that nearly raked off his rider, as they went under a low limb. So low it was that Ed's hat was knocked off. He swore affectionately at the flea-bitten gray pony that was taking such chances. Lizard loved these races as much as the cowboy who owned him.

"Git 'im, Liz!—Git that black devil! Pop that brush, feller! Kick gravel, yuh rascal! We're loopin' that black outlaw, or we'll quit punchin' cows!"

Down the steep slant. Slipping, sliding, but keeping on. Ed's hold on the bridle reins was just hard enough to help the horse keep its balance. This was twisting the devil's tail, and no mistake! A blind race in the fog, and down a steep slant.

Brush raked the cowboy's face, ripping it—catclaw brush is rightly named. The long limbs whipped him, leaving blood trails. But Ed Mullins felt no pain. Somewhere ahead, and not so far ahead, was the black renegade—the one steer whose long horns had never been sawed, though he was the wildest of wild renegade steers in the rough country.

Cowboy and horse were gaining now. Ed reckoned that not more than a hundred yards further there would be an open spot where he could swing his rope.

"Git 'im, Liz!"

His rope tied hard and fast to the saddle horn. Yonder was the clearing. He was almost on top of the black renegade now. A deft flip of his rope, then he sat Lizard back on his rump as the steer hit the end of the rope.

But the slant was too abrupt. More than a ton of bone and hard muscle was hitting the end of that rope. And in his excitement, Ed had caught the black steer too deep. One of those black forelegs had gone through the loop, giving the advantage to the critter instead of to the horse and cowboy.

Horse, man and steer piled up with a terrific crash. Piled up in a heap, there in the granite bowlders. Ed Mullins quit his horse, making one desperate grab at those sharp horns that were tossing, ripping at him. The black steer was bawling crazily, and the sound filled the cowboy's ears as he bent every effort to twist back that wicked black head. Black fury, red-eyed, red-nostriled, lunging with those sharp, pointed horns.

It all happened in split seconds. Ed hadn't seen Johnny Lee as Johnny spurred into the clearing. One of Lizard's shod hoofs had struck Ed a glancing blow on the head. The next thing Ed Mullins knew was when he heard Johnny Lee telling somebody to cut that rope and let the Lizard horse up.

Then, as if he were living a nightmare, he saw Johnny standing there, a smoking six-shooter in his hand. Johnny's face was a yellowish white.

ED crawled clear of the mess. The black steer, shot between the eyes, was twitching in its last death throes.

Ed forced a grin as he crawled free. "I reckon, Johnny, he's yore steer."

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He started to shake hands, but his right arm was useless.

Blood was oozing out of a hole in his shoulder.

"The black son musta hooked me in the pile-up," said Ed.

He looked at Johnny Lee who stood there, his eyes dull, his face white. There was a queer look on Johnny's face as he slid his gun back in the pocket of his chaps.

"How's my Lizard pony?" Ed asked one of the cowboys.

"Crippled up, Ed," said a grizzled cowboy. "He's follered his last wild steer. He's standin' on three laigs. I reckon he's busted a laig. If Johnny will lend me his gun, I'll . . ."

Ed Mullins shook his head. Tears dimmed his eyes as he shook off helping hands and went over to the crippled horse. Ed's face, lacerated by catclaw limbs, bleeding, wet with rain, was pressed against the soft, wet muzzle of the cow pony. His one good arm went around the neck of the horse. Tears mingled with the rain and blood that stained the cowboy's unshaven jaw.

"Ed." It was Johnny Lee's voice, soft, steady, even. "His leg ain't busted. Wrenched, mebbe a pulled tendon. But not busted. Nobody is goin' to borrow my gun to shoot Lizard."

Ed Mullins nodded. "I'll take a look at Lizard's leg. Nobody will use yore gun, Johnny, regardless."

It turned out that Lizard's leg was not broken. Merely a pulled tendon, that would probably pension a game-hearted cow pony who would never again follow a wild steer down a slant.

Somebody wanted to take a look at Ed's shoulder, but Ed shook his head.

"Johnny's horse carries double," he said. "When we git to this camp, he'll patch me up. Butcher that steer and give half of it to Johnny's spread. Save the head. I'm havin' it mounted."

Johnny Lee sent a man to town for the doctor. Then he and Ed rode to the ranch.

It was dark when they got there, but Doc Morgan was already there, and Uncle Joe Parbury had Ed's room ready.

"Ed wins the bets, Uncle Joe," said Johnny. "He caught Black Jack."

"No dice," said Ed. "All bets off. I roped that black son, but if Johnny hadn't showed up when he did, you'd of lost a horse and a cowboy, Uncle Joe. That black hellion shore hooked me."

Uncle Joe nodded. He had seen the look that passed from Ed to Johnny. And later on that night, he had a talk with the old doctor from Coyote.

"How's the boy, Doc?" he asked.

"He'll be laid up a few weeks. That bone has to have time to mend.—Here's the bullet I took out of his shoulder."

Uncle Joe Parbury took the bit of flattened lead in his hand. The doctor shut his bag and lit his cold cigar.

"Got a drink in the house, Joe?"

"Huh? A drink? Shore thing, Doc. I'll git yuh one."

"We both need one."

It was Johnny Lee who stayed all night with Ed Mullins; Johnny Lee who was with him when he came out from under the anæsthetic.

"Awake, Ed?"

"I'm awake, Johnny."

"You have to believe this, Ed. I didn't try to hit you. Things were happening fast. There was you and the horse and the steer. All I could do was shoot. My first shot hit you. Then I got the steer—plumb square between the eyes. Ed, no matter what you think—no matter what you . . ."

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"That's Uncle Joe comin'.—Better shut up, Johnny."

Uncle Joe Parbury came into the room. His face was a little gray, his eyes no longer soft. When he spoke his voice was dull.

"Johnny, I want yore gun," he said.

CHAPTER III.

DECLARATION OF WAR.

FROM that night on the two six-shooters that belonged to Johnny Lee and Ed Mullins were kept in a locked drawer in Uncle Joe Parbury's room. Johnny's gun still had the two empty shells in its cylinder.

Uncle Joe Parbury had not asked Johnny a single question, he had merely told Johnny that he wanted his gun. It must have cut Johnny's heart like a dull knife to have Uncle Joe suspect him, but he had turned over his gun, butt first, to the old cowman. Johnny's face was white, his lips pulled tight, and there was a queer look in his dark eyes as he did so.

When the door had closed on Uncle Joe, as he carried Johnny's gun out of the room, Ed spoke huskily:

"Lemme tell Uncle Joe. It ain't right for him to think you shot me a-purpose, Johnny. I'll have a talk with him."

"No yuh won't. If he figgers I'm a snake, let 'er go as she lays. Mebbe so he's got me sized up right at that."

"Don't talk loco! Uncle Joe's been mighty good to us both. He's raised us from the time we was buttons. Are you goin' back on the deal we made when we was kids? After we had our first fight, we agreed never to let Uncle Joe know how we felt to'rds each other. We agreed we'd stick by him always."

"Yes, but he thinks I tried to kill yuh, Ed." Johnny's eyes were narrowed a little as he stared out the window.

"I'll tell him different!"

Johnny whirled, his lips snarling. "You run off at the head any and I'll slap that mouth of yours shut for keeps. You'd like to play the brave hero and talk yore way into bein' the white-haired boy around here, wouldn't yuh? Takin' my part—talkin' yore blarney! Lucky for you that yo're laid up."

"I won't always be laid up." Ed's grin was crooked. The freckled hand that was free was clenched.

"I'll be waitin'," promised Johnny Lee. "Better be heeled when yuh start in!" He quit the room.

Ed saw Johnny ride away into the red dawn. Already Ed was sorry he had talked as he had. He knew how Johnny would brood over it, just as he would brood over Uncle Joe asking for that gun. Johnny was moody, and too sensitive. Little things like that hurt him, and he let them grow all out of proportion, carried them in his heart always. Ed knew. He knew Johnny Lee and understood him better than Uncle Joe Parbury could ever begin to understand him.

Ed remembered their first fight. It had started over a game of mumble-peg. Ed had licked Johnny and had rubbed his face in the dirt; then he made him pull the peg from the ground with his teeth. Mumble-peg is played with jackknives, and the loser must pull a small, match-sized peg from the ground with his teeth, the peg being driven in to the level of the ground. But instead, Johnny, always a bad loser, had gone after Ed with his jackknife. Ed still carried the scars from that knife, and he had kept the knife

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which he had taken from Johnny that day many years ago.

Later, Ed had tried to make it up. Ed could not carry a grudge more than an hour. He had held out a bandaged hand to Johnny, whose nose by that time had quit bleeding. But Johnny refused the hand.

"Yo're a Mullins; I'm a Lee," Johnny had told him. "Yuh'll always be a Mullins, and I'll always be a Lee."

That was when they were about sixteen. And that was when Ed had made Johnny promised that they would never let Uncle Joe Parbury know that they ever fought.

Now Johnny Lee was carrying his black, brooding grudge away with him. He had left while the others were eating breakfast.

DURING the weeks that Ed was laid up, Johnny Lee ran both outfits.

Cowboys who came to the home ranch for supplies told Ed that Johnny was driving them hard. Daylight till dark. Sparing neither himself, his men, nor his horses.

Joe Parbury was laid up with a bad attack of sciatica during that time. He was still on crutches when Johnny Lee rode up one evening to say that the work had been finished and that the outfit was coming in next day.

Johnny's face was covered with black whiskers. His chaps and boots and hat and jumper were brush-scarred and ragged. He looked gaunt, and his eyes were bloodshot from loss of sleep. But he had gathered more wild cattle, had branded more mavericks and worked the rough country cleaner than any other cowboy who had ever tackled it.

Ed's shoulder was well now. He had been working around the ranch for nearly two weeks — roping calves, working with the bronc twister who was breaking out some steel-dust three-year-olds.

Ed grinned a welcome. "Gosh, I didn't know yuh, Johnny! Hear yuh gathered all the wild stuff in the country!"

He held out a hand. Johnny took it.

Uncle Joe Parbury gripped the shoulders of the two cowboys he had raised. His gesture meant more than words.

"We've bin lonesome without yuh, Johnny," he said. "Figgered yuh'd never come home."

"We missed yuh a lot!" grinned Ed.

Johnny Lee just smiled through his black whiskers.

Ed went to fetch a bottle and three glasses. He hoped that Uncle Joe hadn't caught that glitter in Johnny's bloodshot eyes. He hoped that Uncle Joe hadn't read the challenge there.

They drank together, there in the big living room. Above the fireplace now hung the mounted head of Black Jack. The bullet mark showed in the center of the curly black hair between the widespread horns.

Johnny had a hot bath and a shave. The cook trimmed his hair. And that night he and Ed and Uncle Joe Parbury sat around and talked of cattle and horses and cowboys. Johnny seemed to be in a rare good humor. He laughed and told a number of anecdotes of the range work just completed.

It was midnight when they quit the fireside.

"You two young fellers set awhile," said Uncle Joe, quitting his easy chair and reaching for his crutches.

"We'll be beddin' down directly,"

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promised Ed Mullins, as he helped Uncle Joe get out of his chair.

WHEN the cattleman had gone, Ed faced Johnny Lee. They no longer smiled.

"That shoulder of yours is well, ain't it?" asked Johnny.

"Better than ever, Johnny."

"We might as well settle it now, then."

Ed grinned.

"Our guns is in Uncle Joe's room."

Johnny Lee smiled faintly. "Those ain't the only two guns in the world. There's guns at the bunkhouse. I got mine. You rustle one. We'll go out back of the barn and we'll settle 'er once and for all.—Or have you got religion?"

"Not religion, Johnny. Just a feelin' to'rds Uncle Joe. He was plumb happy to-night, as he set there listenin' and joinin' in the talk. You had him plumb fooled.—When the time comes, we'll ask him for our guns, but the time ain't ripe. You make one play at that gun yo're packin' and I'll take it an' shove it down yore throat! I'm man enough tuh do it, and you know it. You've never licked me. Yuh never will. So play square with Uncle Joe or I'll put yuh in the hospital with my fists. Git that in yore craw, Johnny Lee!"

Ed Mullins was standing close to Johnny Lee. His left fist, freckled and compact, caught Johnny on the point of the jaw; and as Johnny went down, Ed grabbed the gun from the other's hand and shoved it beneath his shirt.

Johnny got slowly to his feet.

"Uncle Joe give yuh a month's vacation," said Ed Mullins. "Take it. I'll meet yuh at Prescott, and I'll beat yore ropin' time. I'll beat yore time doggin'. I'll beat yuh in the bronc ridin'.—From there we'll go on tuh Calgary, Canada. I'll beat yuh there. I'll beat yuh at Pendleton and at Cheyenne and at Salinas. And when we're done with them rodeos, we'll ask Uncle Joe for our guns."

"That's a bet!"

Johnny Lee picked up his hat from the table.

His thin lips smiled faintly.

"And the big prize goes to the best man," he asked. "Is that right?"

"She goes to the best man.—Headin' for town now, ain't yuh?"

"I'm headin' for town, yeah."

"To see Sally?" Ed's voice was perhaps a little thick with pent-up emotion.

"To see Sally Morgan.—I'll give her yore best regards, cowboy."

"Do that!" grinned Ed. "Just do that!—Give her my best regards, and tell her I shore enjoyed them books she sent out to me. Good night, cowboy."

They stood there glaring at one another.

It was Ed who heard the door behind him open, then both of them were staring at Uncle Joe Parbury, standing on his crutches in the doorway that led into the hall.

"Forgot my pipe," he said, hobbling in.

He looked at Johnny Lee who had on his hat and coat. "Goin' out, Johnny?"

"Thought I'd go on to town, Uncle Joe."

"Yuh need some fun," nodded Uncle Joe. "Ed, you goin' with Johnny?"

"I'm follerin' him in a few days.—Here's yore pipe."

Uncle Joe Parbury took the pipe and shoved it in his pocket. Then he shook hands with Johnny and hobbled out on his crutches.

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Johnny followed him, went out and saddled his horse.

ED MULLINS wondered how much Uncle Joe had heard before he opened the door and came in for his pipe. Ed and Johnny, both angry, had been talking rather loudly—and Uncle Joe had good ears. Good eyes, too. Ed's hard fist had bruised Johnny's jaw. And there was that bulge under Ed's shirt where he'd shoved Johnny's six-shooter.

Another thing, Uncle Joe always left his pipe here in the room. He never smoked in his bedroom.—No, Uncle Joe hadn't come back for his pipe.

Ed and Johnny would have been surprised if they could have looked into Uncle Joe Parbury's room after he had hobbled down the hall on his crutches. Once inside the bedroom, he took the pipe from his mouth and laid it on the dresser. Then, from under his shirt he took the old .45 that he had carried so many years and had finally laid aside.

He shoved the weapon in the worn holster that hung, with his old cartridge belt, from the bedpost. But the queer part of it all was that, upon entering the room, he discarded his crutches. In his sock feet, limping slightly, he moved around the room. That probably explained why the boys had not heard him come up the hall while they were talking. Uncle Joe had undoubtedly carried his crutches, and in his sock feet he had made no sound.

Uncle Joe Parbury undressed slowly. He hated to play the part of a spy. But he knew that those weeks in the hills had not worked all the black anger out of Johnny's heart. Johnny was still hunting trouble, and the cowboy's joshing and laughter during the evening had rung false. Johnny had overplayed his part. And so Uncle Joe had slipped back, determined to prevent a fight.

"If only there was some way to keep 'em from goin' the limit!" he mused. "Both of 'em good boys. None better . . . But both stuck on the same girl. Sally Morgan. It was bad enough before. Now it's like a boil comin' to a head."

Uncle Joe Parbury slept little that night. He was fond of both boys. Each of them had a place in his cowman's heart. But it seemed there was nothing he could do to help matters.

He wished that Sally Morgan, that little brown-haired, hazel-eyed daughter of Doc Morgan, would marry some town dude. That might help.

But Sally didn't care for town dudes. She liked to ride, and she liked cowboys. Doc Morgan, on his ranch near town, raised some of the best horses in the country—not show horses, but cow horses. Steel-dust horses that had the heart and bottom and speed that go to make the ideal cow pony. Sally spent most of her time at the ranch, working with the horses after the bronc twister got through with them. She had a way with horses—and with cowboys.

"I reckon," Uncle Joe Parbury told himself, "that a little talk with Sally wouldn't do no harm."

But something in his makeup kept him from having that talk, though he had known Sally ever since she was a baby. He hated to have any one—even Sally, with her good common sense and understanding—know that Johnny and Ed were enemies instead of partners. Uncle Joe didn't want any one to know that his plan had apparently failed.

Joe Parbury didn't know any pray-

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ers. But he got down on his knees that night, and in halting, awkward, humble words, he asked God to save Ed and Johnny from carrying out what they planned.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE WRONG.

AT the Prescott Frontier Days, Johnny made faster time than any other man in the calf tying. Ed won first money in the bronc riding.

At the rodeo headquarters, there in the courthouse, when the cowboys were signing up for the various events, Johnny and Ed had signed for the team tying. Two men to a steer.

"And we got money," grinned Ed Mullins, "that says to you other cowboys that me and Johnny takes away the fastest time made."

Until the last day of the contest it looked as though Ed and Johnny would win the bets they had made. Had it not been for a bit of hard luck on that last day, they would have broken the world's record, and would have beaten the time of the two contestants who walked off with first money.

"It was my fault, Johnny," said Ed Mullins. "I should of picked up them heels faster. Dunno why I missed the first dab at 'em."

"Yore leaky loop cost us just five hundred dollars," said Johnny Lee as he turned away.

Ed hadn't mentioned to Johnny that yesterday, in the bronc riding, he had twisted his right shoulder—the one that had been shot—and that it had been stiff and lame the last day. He wouldn't make excuses to Johnny Lee.

It was only when they got to Calgary and shared the same big room with half a dozen other contestants, that Johnny found out. Ed had peeled off his shirt and undershirt, and Johnny saw the taped shoulder and the arm, swollen and discolored. Then he knew.

Ed, in the bathroom, was rubbing arnica on his lame shoulder and he hadn't seen Johnny come in. Not until he caught the reflection of Johnny's face in the mirror. He tried to get his shirt on, but he was too late. Johnny closed the door, and the two were shut in the bathroom. From beyond the closed door came the sound of the other boys' voices. Pat Ryan's portable Victrola was playing a cowboy song.

Johnny bolted the door and leaned against it. "When did you get that bum shoulder?"

"Last week at Prescott. When that big brown bronc fell as I come outa the chute."

"And yuh go paradin' it around. How do I know yuh didn't get it on the way up here to Canada?—The wounded hero wantin' the world to know that he's brave! Wantin' them boys out here to see."

"I thought the bathroom door was locked," said Ed.

"Well, it wasn't. But it is now. And now you've got yore alibi why we lost that team tyin'. I mighta knowed yuh'd pull somethin' like that."

Ed Mullins corked the liniment bottle and put it in the wash basin. The freckles on his square jawed face stood out like brown warts.

"Take 'er back, Johnny, or I'll spoil yuh for this contest.—Take 'er back!"

Johnny, a sneer on his lips, stood braced. "Make me!"

"Yuh asked for it!"

Ed Mullins lunged, his hard-muscled

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bulk behind his two fists. Johnny met the attack with lean-muscled, lacing jabs.

Out in the other room the phonograph blared forth its song, cowboys were arguing, a crap shooter was calling in no uncertain terms upon Lady Luck to help a wild cowboy make his point. Nobody paid any heed to the noise in the bathroom.

A terrific right swing rocked Johnny's head. Johnny's head struck the door, and his knees buckled. Ed wiped the blood from his bruised mouth and pulled on his shirt and undershirt. Then he wet a towel and slapped Johnny in the face with it until the latter blinked his eyes.

"Come alive, Johnny! Yuh oughta know you can't lick me. — Stand up and unlock the door. No use in them boys knowin' anything. And I'm bettin' you a hundred that I beat yore time in the steer decoratin'."

Ed's quick anger had gone, though hot tears still stood in his eyes. He wiped them away with the wet towel, then grinned.

"Johnny, let's shake and call 'er off for keeps. I got a bellyfull of this fightin'. I wish yuh'd shake."

"Yo're a Mullins; I'm a Lee!" Johnny's eyes were like black agate as he said it.

ED unbolted the door and went out into the room, whistling through bruised lips. His right shoulder was throbbing with pain. He wished he hadn't gone wild and used that right on Johnny. A left would have done it. He could see his chances slipping in the roping and 'dogging. And against these Northwest cowboys he would have a slim chance in the bronc riding. They were used to the big, stout, grain-fed broncs Pat Ryan, if Pat was right, was almost a cinch to win the bronc riding. Pat or the Canada Kid or Pete Knight. One of those boys who preferred a bronc that was big and hard. But Ed Mullins kept whistling.

The room was crowded with cowboys. They sat around on the cots or on the floor, a floor already littered with saddles, ropes, hogging strings, boots, and chaps that had been tossed in corners. The talk was of broncs and roping and bulldogging. A good-natured, happy-go-lucky crowd.

There was a crap game going on, and in one corner a stud game. Somebody was hoorawing Latigo Adams from Nogales because he was wearing silk underwear—and Latigo was taking it with a grin. He had just bet plenty that he would win the steer decorating, and the wise ones knew that it was almost a cinch that this long-geared cowboy from Arizona would 'dog his steer in record time.

The cream of contest men, here in this crowded room; cowboys whose names would go down in rodeo history. They came and went. Changing a shirt, shaving, trying a hand at the poker or crap games. Now and then a cowboy's wild "Yip-yippy!" That would be a Breezy, one of the best in the game.

Ed Mullins was one of them. Joshing, laughing, hoorawing. He was well liked by that bunch of contest cowboys who rode and roped and 'dogged—and traveled on to the next big contest. They had their quarrels, their jealousies, their friendships, and the one thing they shared in common was their love of the dangerous game they played. Ed fitted in.

Johnny was slower to make friends, but every man among them knew him to be one of the fastest cowboys who

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had ever forked a horse in a broken country where only the wild cowboys can survive. They respected his ability, both as a cowman and as a contestant. But no man among them had ever made friends with him.

Ed Mullins knew that Johnny, alone there in the bathroom, was suffering a gnawing torture of hatred. He knew that Johnny Lee wanted to tell him that he, Johnny, was in the wrong; but that there was something in the heart of that son of the Lee clan which kept him from coming out and admitting his mistake. He knew that in some way Johnny would let him know that he savvied—for Johnny never stayed in any man's debt.

Ed was right in his surmise. Johnny, in his own way, let Ed know that he had been in the wrong, and that he knew it, even when he made his unjust accusations about Ed. The play came up the last day of the Calgary Stampede.

CHAPTER V.

GANGED!

ED had left the grounds late that last day. He and Johnny were pulling out the next morning for the Pendleton show. They would go in the same car with their rope horses and the three bucking horses they had entered at Calgary.

"Collect my money," Ed had told Johnny, "and I'll feed the horses and take care of the barn bill."

In spite of his injured shoulder, Ed had beaten Johnny's time in the steer decorating and the bronc riding. Johnny had beat him in the roping, too.

They had scarcely spoken to one another since their fight in the bathroom at the hotel. Ed had made a dozen advances, but they had met with no success; and now, whenever they spoke to one another, it was only because necessity demanded.

"I'll 'tend to my own horses!" replied Johnny Lee, curtly.

"That bein' the case, I'll collect my own prize money."

Ed walked away whistling, headed for the Stampede headquarters.

A crowd of contestants stood outside the building. One big cowboy from Dakota or Montana was half drunk, and in an ugly frame of mind. With him were some of his cronies who had been tippling at the same bottle.

"That's him, now," said one of them, and they all looked at Ed Mullins as he came up.

The big cowboy blocked his way. "You stole that day money to-day in the bronc ridin', Mullins!" he began, accusingly.

"Make yore holler to the judges, then—or to the management."

Ed started to walk past, but the big contestant's hand spun him around.

"I'll take it out of yore hide, Mullins," he snarled.

"I'm goin' in now to collect what few dollars I got comin'. Meet me at the barn, big feller, if yuh just nacherally got to fight."

"I'll be at the barn, all right," growled the big cowboy, moving away as a policeman neared the group.

The law is very strict in Canada, and the police have ways of handling offenders.

Ed collected his money and went on to the barn. There he saw the big cowboy and three others, in an empty box stall. In Ed's pocket was over a thousand dollars in cash—prize money, and money he had won making side bets. He knew the type of men he

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was up against. They were the breed of crooks who have hurt the rodeo game all over the country. The odds were four to one against Ed now, and he knew that once they were inside that locked box stall, he wouldn't have a chance.

He saw the leering grin on the big cowboy's face, saw his heavy fists knotting, and heard the profane promises the big fellow was making to his companions—how he'd hang a Mullins hide on the fence.

Then Ed saw the game. They knew he'd be carrying the money, and they were planning to rob him after they had beaten him up, perhaps killed him.

Ed saw Johnny, watering his rope horse there at the trough, not more than a hundred feet away. Johnny had a gun on him, that was a cinch—and a gun would even the odds just now.—But Ed wasn't calling on Johnny for help; he wasn't giving Johnny that satisfaction.

Ed walked up to the four men standing in front of the empty box stall.

"Where's the rest of yore gang, big feller?" grinned Ed. "I'd shore be proud if I had just half uh yore crust."

Ed waded in. Fists swinging, he bored into the bigger man with a low attack that had the ferocity of a bulldog's.

Its sudden rush staggered the big man, sending him reeling. Then Ed's back was to the wall of the barn, and as they ganged him, he fought with hands and feet.

But the odds were too great against him. He went down, smothered by their weight. Boot heels crashed into his ribs and face. He got a strangle hold on the big cowboy's neck, and sank his teeth in the man's ear. Ed heard the bellow of pain. He hardly felt the boots and fists that were hurting him, and that big man on top of him was more protection than harm.

THEN he heard Johnny Lee's voice. Out of the mêlée he saw Johnny, letting go the hackamore of his rope horse, coming on a run. And as he twisted from under that big cowboy he saw Johnny wading into the fight. Johnny, with a snarl on his thin lips and his two fists ripping and smashing. Dust. A smear of blood. Johnny's cold, hard voice, cursing as he fought—fought with the swift, deadly, flashing cruelty of a tiger.

Ed, blinded by the blood and dust, got a blurred sight of it all. He saw Johnny knock two men cold. He saw Johnny jerk that big man up and slam him against the side of the barn, ripping his face with swift, slashing punches that dropped the big man. Then Johnny twisted away from another man who had leaped on his back, and with a twisted grin, Johnny knocked the man cold.

As three policemen and a Mountie showed up, Johnny was lifting Ed from the ground.

"Hurt, Ed?" he asked.

"Lost some hide, that's all."

Johnny handed three guns to the Mountie. "Just toys I taken off these rodeo tramps, officer. They'll not need 'em for a little while, I reckon."

Ed looked at the four men. They were sitting up now, battered and bleeding from Johnny's terrific attack. Then he looked at Johnny, who was brushing the dirt from his clothes. Ed had never seen Johnny like that—with a face twisted into a queer smile.

Johnny winked at Ed as he handed over the guns to the red-coated Mountie. The Mountie was staring at the face of the big contestant who had

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started the row. Then he turned to one of the policemen.

"Lock up those four men. This big chap is wanted in the States for murder. There's a reward on him. Hold the others on some charge or other until we check up on them. I've a notion they're bad ones."

He turned to Johnny, smiling faintly.

"Keep the change, officer!" said Johnny, cheerfully. "Never mind the bouquets!—Leave my pardner and me out of it. They tried to gang up and rob Ed, here, but they came out the losers. Don't hold us up here in Calgary to-morrow, because if we miss that train out in the mornin', it will throw us late for the show at Pendleton."

"No need to worry," said the Mountie, when the policemen had taken away the prisoners. "I don't know who you are or what the trouble was. We're just taking care of some rowdies. You two leave your names and addresses with Guy Weadick at the Stampede office.—By the way, that was nice roping you did to-day, Johnny Lee. And Ed Mullins is one of the best bronc riders I've ever seen. Good luck at Pendleton!"

WHEN he had walked away, Ed grinned through the smear of dust and blood. Johnny rolled a smoke.

"He knowed us, Johnny!"

"Yeah. He was all right, that redcoat."

"It was white of yuh, Johnny. I ain't forgettin'."

Johnny Lee looked hard at Ed Mullins. "Ed, I shot yuh through the shoulder, that time. That shoulder won't be healed for a long time. I know, because I asked the doctor that yuh went to here in Calgary. He says it will take a year, anyhow, till it's strong. I didn't know, there in Prescott, why yuh acted so stiff-armed. But I know now.—What you give me in the bathroom at the hotel I had comin'. Makes a man feel like some kind of a damned coyote."

"Shut up, Johnny! There ain't no coyote in you. And I'm tellin' a man that if you'd of put up half the fight then that yuh just put up now, you'd of had me scattered all over that bathroom in small hunks."

What Ed said was true. Johnny Lee had fought with the ferocity of a tiger. He had licked four men in less than ten minutes. And Ed Mullins knew that Johnny had fought that way because he was fighting for his pardner, and not for himself.

"Let's take care of the horses, Ed, then go to town."

"Mind shakin' hands, Johnny?"

"Hand shakin' went outa style between the Mullins outfit and the Lees some years ago," said Johnny sullenly.

"Make 'er easy on yorese'f, Johnny."

Ed washed under the stable faucet and dried his hands and face on the tail of his shirt. Then he grinned widely as he said:

"Johnny, that was shore slick—how yuh slipped that gun of yourn in with them other guns yuh taken off them jaspers. If that law feller had searched yuh an' found that cannon on yuh, he'd of held us up an' they'd of slapped a fine—mebbeso a jail sentence—on us both. Then we'd of lost our chances at the Pendleton show."

"How did yuh know that was my gun with them others, Ed?"

"I happened to be in the store—back in the rear part—when you bought it off that store man, payin'

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him twice what it was worth if he didn't keep a record of the sale."

"I'll buy another at Pendleton."

"That's yore business, not mine. I got a gun at the Tumblin' T ranch that will do me—when I need it. We better wait till we git to the home ranch, Johnny, before we make that gunplay."

Johnny Lee's eyes narrowed. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a letter. The blue envelope was wrinkled and a little soiled. It was addressed to Ed Mullins, in care of the Paliser Hotel, at Calgary, and it had been opened.

As Johnny walked away, Ed Mullins pulled the letter from the opened envelope. It was just a brief note. He read:

Dear Ed:

Will be meeting you at Calgary, the last day of the stampede. You and Johnny meet me at the hotel after the show. Will be getting in late, but not too late to attend the Cowboys' Ball. I need both you and Johnny for escorts. I'll be going on with you to Pendleton Round-Up. I'm bringing a string of relay horses and am out to win.

Love to you both!

Sally.

CHAPTER VI.

HEELED IN SPITE OF HIMSELF.

ED MULLINS, bathed and shaved and dressed in his town clothes, took Sally Morgan to the Cowboys' Ball that night. He joshed and laughed and did a lot of hoorawing. He and Sally won first prize at the dance.

Ed introduced her to the cowboys and the Stampede officials. There was to be a banquet after the dance.

"Ed, where is Johnny?" she asked when he met her to go to the dance.

"I reckon Johnny will show up later."

Sally, during all the confusion and excitement at the dance, had all but forgotten Johnny Lee. But at the banquet, later that night, she sought out Ed and again she questioned him.

"Ed, where's Johnny?—Is there anything wrong?"

"Nothin' wrong," lied Ed. "Calgary, on the last night of the Stampede, is sorta wild. I reckon Johnny's got tied up with one of the other crowds that's celebratin'."

"Ed, did Johnny know I was coming?" Sally's voice had lost something of its softness.

"No." Ed Mullins grinned as he lied to the girl.

Ed didn't know where Johnny was. Later, when Sally had gone to her hotel room, he would go and find him. He reckoned there would be another fight, but he wasn't going to let Sally Morgan know. He wasn't going to tell her that Johnny had opened that letter before giving it to him. No use mixing Sally up in the deal.

"You mean, Ed, that you didn't show Johnny my letter?"

"No, I didn't show Johnny yore letter."

"That's nothing to grin about, Ed. That letter was meant for both of you boys. I wanted Johnny to be here tonight."

"That's just Johnny Lee's hard luck. Everything is fair, so the sayin' goes, when a man's in love, or when he goes to war. Sally, it might be that I'll be askin' yuh to marry me some day—after we git home."

"Ed, have you been hitting the bottle?"

"Me? I don't use it."

"Then I can't understand why you'd double-cross Johnny. If you

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were tight, there'd be some excuse. You knew that letter was meant for both you and Johnny, but you didn't show it to him.—Marry you? Marry a man who would do a dirty trick like that? Not while I'm in my right mind!—I'm going to my room. And I'm not in need of your company when I leave the table. Ed, this is the first time I ever suspected there was snake blood in you.—Good night."

Ed went up to the room where he and Johnny and the other boys were staying. He found a crowd there, talking and laughing and arguing and celebrating.

"Anybody seen Johnny Lee?"

"Not since supper.—Call up the jail, Ed. Ask for a list of the cowboys that's lost, strayed or stolen."

Ed saw that Johnny's stuff was gone from the room. Boots, spurs, ropes, chaps, clothes, were gone.

Ed packed his own stuff and left the room, loaded down with his gear.

"See you boys at Pendleton," he said as he left.

HE caught a taxi and went out to the stables. The stalls were empty. Both his and Johnny's horses were gone.

Ed hunted up one of the barn men.

"Johnny Lee? He pulled out on that midnight train with the horses. Said to tell you he'd meet you in Pendleton."

"I didn't know there was a train at midnight."

"Special train for them that wanted to get to Pendleton early. Most of the contestants shipped their horses out on it.—Say, I doggone near forgot to tell you. There's some horses here belongin' to a Miss Morgan, from Arizona. She left word to tell you to look 'em over. Relay horses."

"I'll look 'em over. Show me the stalls where they're kept. I'll have a look at 'em now. I—"

From one of the stalls near by there came the sound of a horse, nickering softly. And there, above the lower half-door of the stall, showed the head and neck of a gray gelding.

"Lizard!"

Ed was rubbing the furry ears, and his cheek was against the soft, velvety muzzle of his pet horse. He was talking in a broken whisper as he led Lizard out of the stall; and Lizard, perhaps by way of greeting, pranced around, whistling, and crow-hopping a jump or two.

"He's as sound as a dollar," chuckled Ed.

"So Miss Morgan said."

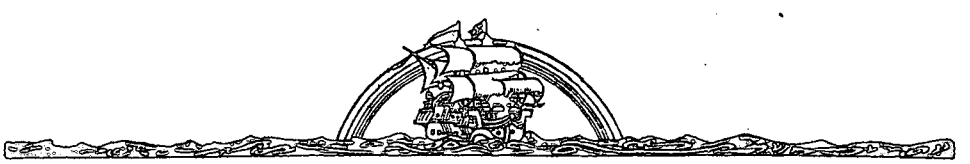
"This flea-bitten son is the best rope horse that ever followed a wild steer, mister," bragged Ed.

"So the lady said. And that's what Johnny Lee said, too. Doggone, I like to forgot. Here's a package for yuh. Johnny Lee left it."

After the barn man had gone, Ed ripped open the brown paper package. He frowned at the .45 that had been so carefully wrapped inside the paper. And in the gray light of the new day he read the brief note shoved in the trigger guard:

Pack this.—You'll need it.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



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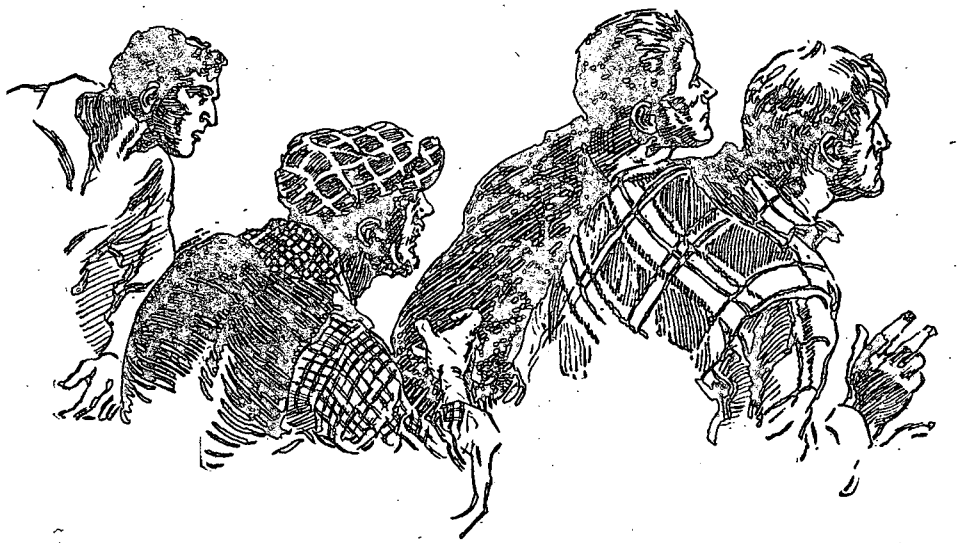
Partners All

By JACK ALLMAN

Author of "Skin Diver," "Scuttled Gold," etc.

Red Bruce, Alaska riverman, knew that one of the men he was guiding to a gold strike was a would-be murderer. Which one was it?



"He's dead?" the big towhead gasped

CHAPTER I.

FIVE WHO SURVIVED.

SIX tense men and a dog rode the racing, bouncing power launch. The dog, a reddish gray malemute, clung precariously to the top of the capacity load—sacked food, rifles, axes, picks, shovels, and gold pans. Prospectors' supplies.

The men crouched in awkward positions along the sides, their feet buried in the duffle, their knees braced against the gunwales. Two held long poles alertly. One gripped the thin shaft of a canoe paddle. Another clung to a bit of exposed thwart.

Cut banks of solid rock rushed past on either side at a dizzy speed. White water boiled around and ahead of them. Ragged bowlders the size of pitched tents stuck up through the surface and tore the mad, glacier-fed river into green and white ribbons with borders of lacy spume and spray. A zenith-high sun wove broken chunks of rainbow through the veils of mist.

A channel opened up between two rocks. For a fleeting second it looked like a safe passage, then a shallow, unavoidable shelf appeared just beyond. The nose of the boat—full power on to give steerage-way—missed disaster by inches as she obediently answered the deft spins of the red-headed man at the small wheel. It wasn't a matter of an expert white-water man reading the channels ahead, it was a

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guessing contest—with everything in the river's favor.

The redhead at the wheel had his mouth set, and though his blue eyes coolly scanned the way ahead there was

Novelette—
Complete

"One of you birds is going to answer to me," Red snapped

knowledge of the danger in them. The rest, except for a blond giant, were quietly alert and ready for anything that might happen. The towhead seemed to be really enjoying the mad ride. He was grinning widely.

Suddenly the boat's momentum checked. There was a dragging rip along her keel. A submerged rock. The heavy iron skag that protected the propeller caught, held for a moment, then tore loose and locked the brass blades of the screw.

Without power she swung cross-current, jerked crazily over another rock, tilted at an angle of forty-five degrees, and then the angry waters swept her on. A big bowlder loomed dead ahead. A foaming comber lifted the boat; dashed it on.

The yelping of the excited dog mixed with the hoarse warning shouts of the men. The crash of splintering wood rose above the angry roar of the waters.

The first impact broke the boat's back. Men were thrown headlong, one against the rock, where the swinging of the after half of the craft crushed him mercilessly. The dog grasped him by the shirt as he slipped beneath the surface. The two parts of the boat rolled over, spilling cargo, and were then swept hurriedly on.

The only one to retain a hold on the rock was the redhead, and from his perch he could see the bobbing heads in the foam flecked water. One was slammed against a bowlder, then tipped over till the sun glinted from his wet rubber shoepacs. He saw the blond giant give the unfortunate fellow a helping hand; watched them make shore after a terrific battle. The others were being carried rapidly downstream.

He watched the dog tugging valiantly at his master, whose ginger colored whiskers were barely awash and looked like the frayed end of a hemp rope. The current lodged them against a sharp

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rock and held them there, fifty feet from the shore. The tugging of the dog pulled the man's head under.

The steersman shot a quick glance at the near bank. It would be easy for him to reach it. His eyes snapped back to the man and the dog. Off came his laced boots. A heave landed them safely among the rocks. His hat with its wreathed mosquito veil sailed along in their wake. Hardly a ripple followed his heels into the eddy below the bowlder that had wrecked his boat.

Ten strokes with the current landed him. He grasped the injured man and kicked off for shore, the dog swimming beside him. For one foot toward the goal he was dragged five yards downstream. Dashed against rocks. Sucked under. Still the redhead fought to keep his burden afloat. The towhead and the man he had helped watched them for a couple of breathless minutes, then jumped back in to give the launch owner a hand. The next ten minutes were hell.

At the end of that time they landed the crushed man at the foot of the rapids. He was unconscious and hardly breathing. Another who had saved himself was climbing weakly up the bank.

They stretched the injured man out on a bed of moss, and his dog snuggled his panting muzzle close into the curve of his master's neck. The redhead, probably feeling some responsibility for the wreck, took immediate charge. His voice snapped authoritatively.

"All right, come on," he said. "There's slack water and riffles below here. Maybe we can salvage something before it's carried too far away." Still puffing from his exertions in the water, he led off down the bank at a trot. They had gone but a short distance when they came upon the last man. He was clinging to shore rock, too exhausted to pull himself out of the water. They gave him a hand and continued on.

Two rolls of sodden bedding, a sack of flour, four hats with their mosquito veils still attached, and a small tin of block sulphur matches—soldered tight for transportation on just such trips as this—were recovered.

THE redhead was the last to leave the water. As he swam back from the opposite shore for the last time the four stood admiring his skill and the power of his solidly knit body. They all knew his reputation as the best white-water man in Alaska, though none of them had met him until a few days before.

In fact, they hadn't met one another till the whispered word of a new gold strike on the headwaters of the Kitlik River had thrown them together as passengers on the power boat owned by this man who was known to them as Red Bruce. Reckless with stampede fever, they had talked him into taking them into water which he had warned them was dangerous.

When Red splashed ashore he shook himself like a spaniel. He was carrying a book he had saved. The others saw that it was a treatise on aircraft. As he swung it with long sweeps of a thick arm covered with red hair from wrist to elbow, glistening drops fell among freckles the size and color of lentils that covered his powerful shoulders. He slapped viciously at the horde of mosquitoes that lit upon his bare body and hurriedly donned his wet clothing.

When he was dressed he picked up one roll of bedding and the tin of matches. "Take a look on that second riffle below," he said. "I'll start a fire back there where Doyle is and get these

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blankets dried out. He's going to need care." He swung off up the bank without even looking to see if his order would be obeyed.

The injured man was moaning feebly when he arrived. Bruce opened his shirt and saw that all the ribs on one side had been crushed in. He hurriedly gathered dead branches from the lower parts of near-by spruce and started a fire. He fed it with some drift that had been lodged among the rocks during high water.

He was just unlashing the wet bed roll with his own name stenciled on the canvas tarpaulin when a low whine from the dog drew his attention. The man with the ginger whiskers lifted one arm and called him in a weak whisper. Red stepped over beside him.

"O. K., Doyle," he said cheerfully. "Have you all fixed up here in a few minutes."

The pallor of near-death was in the hairless skin around Doyle's eyes. His pain-twisted lips were almost gray. He motioned for the other to bend down closer.

"Bruce," he whispered feebly, "Mary's alone at the cabin. Promise me you'll save her. Promise me, boy! Promise me!"

"What cabin? Save her from what?" Red's crouching body had tensed.

"My cabin over on the head of Meade River. Moose Miller knows I made strike. Saw me deposit twenty thousand at Bone City. Three times as much more at cabin, and my daughter's alone. Moose's on way in with gang, going overland. He's guessed where I was prospecting."

HIS voice was trailing off a little now, and Red bent down closer.

"Trying to beat you back, eh?" he said.

Doyle nodded. "They doped me—bum whisky. But I heard 'em planning to have a man trail me to the cabin and then kill me. I started dope about Kitlik to throw 'em off, but Moose was wise. One of the men on the boat was after me. I'm dying, Bruce. Promise me you'll save Mary. Promise me, boy."

Bruce nodded. "Sure. Take it easy now, don't get yourself all excited."

A feeble smile hid some of the glaze that was appearing in the older man's eyes "Fine," he said. "Take half the gold. Almost gumboot full at cabin. Take the claim! Only don't let Moose get his hands on the girl."

"Easy now, lay back there, and never mind the gold part of it," said Red. "Why didn't you tell me there was a man on the boat out to kill you?"

Doyle tried to talk, shook his head.

"Which one is a member of Moose's gang?" There was a snap to Red's question.

Before he could answer a spell of coughing racked Doyle. A reddish bubble grew on his lips, burst. "I don't know," he breathed. "No matter—all lost in the wreck. You promised me. Why re—" There was another agonized spell of coughing. Red grasped one limp hand.

"We're all saved, Doyle. The others'll be here any minute. Which one is it? Which one?"

Doyle looked at him with a fixed stare. His glassy eyes opened wide, then slowly closed. Every muscle in his body relaxed, wilted. A low whine came from deep in the dog's throat. Red rose slowly to his feet.

For a long minute he stood watching the four figures coming up along the bank. His eyes were narrowed slits. The fingers of his hands hanging at his sides opened and closed.

"So one of you birds is a would-be

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murderer," was the thought running through his head. His brain raced along as he tried to lay his finger on which was most apt to be a member of the sluice robbing, claim jumping, fur thieving band of cutthroats led by Moose Miller, the scourge of Alaska.

On the trip up-river, through the lake and down to the scene of the wreck there had been little chance for them to get acquainted. The six hours of August darkness had been given over to sleep. The rest of the time had been spent fighting fast water.

Now, without a rifle with which to kill game, with miles of uninhabited Alaskan wilderness between them and civilization, and with his own promise to a dead man still ringing in his ears, Red knew that he faced a problem. The fact that one with whom he would have to throw in knew about the girl and the gold, and was no doubt something of a professional killer was by no means the smallest part of this problem.

CHAPTER II.

"GUILTY AS HELL!"

THE men were almost to him when he made a sudden decision. He leaped for his pack, finished unlashing it, and rolled it out just as the others arrived and tossed the remainder of the salvage down by the fire. They turned around to face a wicked-looking, long-barreled revolver in Red Bruce's steady hand. A couple expressed their astonishment.

"What's this?"

"What the hell?"

Red didn't answer. His blue eyes were cold as glacier ice as they rested upon the face of, first one and then another.

"One of you birds is going to answer to me," he snapped. "Who took passage on my boat for the purpose of killing Doyle? Which of you belongs to Moose Miller's gang?"

There was a moment of tight silence, broken only by the roar of the rapids above and the raucous bray of a kingfisher that swept like a blue streak across the river.

The big towhead was the first to speak, and that wasn't until after he had looked around and seen the still figure of the man with the ginger colored beard.

"Dead?" he gasped. His face betrayed more than a casual concern over Doyle's death. "What makes you think some one was out to kill him? You know it was the crush that did it."

The muzzle of Red's gun moved an inch. "I know that one of you four came along for the purpose of getting him, and I'm going to find out which of you it is. Since you seem to think I was addressing you personally, you might explain who you are and how you happened to be on this trip."

The big blond, who had given the name of Erik Matson at the time he bought his passage, looked challengingly at the others before answering, then showed his square white teeth in a half amused grin.

"Sure, if it's worrying you that much. I'm from down around Malataka Inlet on the southeastern coast. Gill netter and seiner during salmon season. Got a yen to see the interior of Alaska. Landed in Bone City the day that this news about a strike on the Kitlik got around. Decided to take a fling at prospecting. That satisfy you?" He glanced again at the dead man.

"Not by a damned sight," snapped

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Red. "You've been on top of my mind ever since I got this dope. Seen you eyeing Doyle up a number of times since we started, and you loaded your outfit on right after him. I saw you follow him down to the boat from the trading post."

"Well, what of it?"

"'Nother thing," continued Bruce, "you acted like you'd been on this kind of a trip before. You were too damned cool during the wreck. Seem to know considerable about boats."

"We don't fish salmon out of automobiles," said Matson. He turned away and placed one of the salvaged hats over the dead man's face.

Red followed him with his eyes. Then said: "I've got my own ideas about who you might be."

"I don't know what's eating at you," said Erik. "But whatever it is, you're all wet."

Red Bruce gave an angry little snort and turned his gun toward a tall, rangy chap with curly black hair. "How about you? Where you from?"

The man, who was known to them as Ed Slope, wasn't in the least excited. When he spoke it was with a slow, easy drawl. "Well," he said, "I've worked just about every place in Alaska where there's any hard rock mining. Was powder-monkey at Treadwell once. Worked in the copper at Kennicott. Batted steel in those jerkwater quartz mines around Fairbanks. Happened to be in Bone when I heard of that poke coming in from Kitlik. Thought I'd try placer mining for a change."

RED looked him coldly in the eye for a second and swung to the next; a big, bony chap with an angular face the color of an old saddle. His hair was stiff and black. If it hadn't been for the deep gray of his eyes he could easily be mistaken for an Indian.

He had given the name of Dode Waller, and though he had rivaled Red for efficiency in making quick camps at night and in getting things ready for an early morning start, he hadn't spoken a dozen words on the trip. Hot anger smoldered in his eyes as he looked into the muzzle of the gun.

"I know Moose Miller," he said, slowly. "Had a run-in with him over stolen fur once. I trap winters and prospect summers. I'm here for the same reason the rest are; to try and grab off a claim on the Kitlik."

"So you know Moose, eh?" said Red.

"Too damned well," replied Waller.

THE last man stepped forward and offered his story without being questioned. "I told you guys to call me Sam when we started out. Well, my full name is Samuel B. Kirk. Fur trader, dog musher, woodcutter around the mines, anything you want. Take in every stampede that comes along."

He was the oldest of the bunch, probably around forty, while the rest were all in their late twenties. He had a sandy, untrimmed stubble and dark, deep-set eyes. He had been the most talkative on the trip.

"Professional stampeder, then?" said Bruce.

Sam grinned. "Yep, take 'em all in. Work only to get a grubstake to outfit myself for the next one."

Red's face tightened and he stepped a little closer. "Maybe you can tell me why there was no ax in your outfit? Where'd you expect to get one?"

Kirk laughed. "Ax! Hell, I never pack one in summer. I'm a pretty good Siwash when it comes to getting around

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the country. I don't need an ax. I'd rather travel light." He jerked a thumb toward Erik. "I noticed he hasn't got one either."

"That's right," said Red. "Where'd you expect to pick up an ax, Matson? Use Doyle's after you got rid of him?"

Slow color rose to Erik's cheeks, and as quickly left. He stepped right up to the muzzle of Bruce's gun. "Listen," he said, "I don't like this a little bit. What in hell you trying to do? Hold a trial here or something? If you are, accuse every one equally. Don't be pointing your finger at me all the time. I'm telling you right now that I'm not answering any more questions. How do you like that, Mr. Judge and Jury?"

"What in hell's this all about, anyway?" asked Sam Kirk.

"Yeah, what happened?" put in Slope.

Red was shaking with anger as he watched the big blond turn and walk away. The questions were repeated, and then he told them what he learned from Doyle.

As the story unrolled questioning glances darted back and forth among the five men. Erik Matson, sitting beside the dying fire with the reddish gray malemute's head on his lap, was the recipient of most of them.

The greatest surprise came when Bruce told them that the whispered reports of the strike on the Kitlik were groundless; that Doyle had started that report himself in an unsuccessful attempt to throw Moose Miller off the trail.

"I'm sticking to my promise," said Red. "I'm going to reach that cabin ahead of Moose and get the girl away." His gaze fell first upon one and then another of the four. "There are three of you here who would join me if you could have heard Doyle's plea. The other . . . well, he's bound to show his real colors."

Every man immediately signified his intention of joining Red, and Bruce became more confused than ever. One was playing a part. Which one? He would have given anything to know. He still glanced more frequently at Erik, but something about Matson seemed to ring true. As he analyzed the situation he felt the same about each of the others.

He looked at Ed Slope. Hard rock man on his first placer stampede, and looking the part.

Dode Waller. Quiet, efficient. Still water runs deep.

Sam Kirk. Hundreds like him in every part of Alaska. Stampeding. Missing out. Working at the first job which offered. Then spending the money in an attempt to get in on the ground floor of the next excitement.

RED BRUCE and Erik Matson did all the diving at the end of the bed lashings in an attempt to salvage a rifle from the eddy below the rock on which they had wrecked. No luck. When they returned to the fire every one chipped in and scraped out a shallow grave for Doyle. They covered it with rocks, and it was Erik who made a small cross which he bound together with withes of willow.

They made thick dough-gods of flour and water which they baked on hot stones. They slept with their heads and hands under Red's bed net—the only one that was recovered.

Bruce, with his revolver clamped tightly under one arm, lay awake most of the night. He wished, time and again, that he had more than the pair of cartridges which happened to be in his gun.

He was first up. None had rested

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well, so they said, and Red's theory that the crook, knowing he was safe, would be the freshest in the morning was blown up.

They divided the equipment up into five packs. There was no mention of breakfast. When they were ready to start the dog refused to budge from beside his master's grave. It was Erik who finally coaxed him to come along, and as they strung out through the scraggly timber he stuck close to Matson's heels. Once or twice he sat down, pawed the mosquitoes from his nose, and looked wistfully back.

Ten o'clock found them out of the scrub spruce and mushing through shoulder-high brush. They munched blueberries as they went along. At noon they faced a wide tundra flat, level as a billiard table and swarming with mosquitoes. They splashed out into the ankle depth stagnant water that lay between the hummocks of wiry grass.

Red was in the lead and using a distant hilltop as a guide. Dode Waller followed along in silence for a while, then told Bruce that the head of the Kitlik lay a little farther to the left. The buzzing of the insects and the vicious stabbing of their bills through shirt fabric and into unprotected hands and wrists had had its effect on every one's nerves.

Dode granted Red a knowledge of the waterways, but insisted that he'd been over this country afoot and knew where the divide between the Meade and the Kitlik lay. Bruce surrendered the lead.

Darkness caught them still miles from the foothills and they spent the night sitting up with their feet in water, their protecting veils drawn tight down onto their shoulders. They started with daylight again. The flat seemed interminable.

"I told you birds we shouldn't have left Bone City on Friday," said Red. "Look what we're into."

"No other route we could have taken?" asked Slope.

"I guess this is the shortest," replied Erik, "though we might have made better time if we had taken the bare caribou ridges like Doyle did on the way out."

Four pair of eyes whipped to his face. They were resting at the moment, and every man was frozen stiff.

"So you know which way Doyle came out, do you?" There was a direct accusation in Red's tone.

"Why . . . why . . . I just imagined that he would come out that way," stammered Erik. The mesh of his veil failed to hide the sudden flush which rose to his cheeks.

A look charged with meaning passed among the others. They all got to their feet and continued on without a word.

THE man in the lead was continually stepping into deep holes which the others could avoid. It was tiring and they decided to take turns, heading always for the landmark Waller had indicated.

When it came Erik's time to feel out the way ahead the others fell back about fifty yards.

"Notice what he said about Doyle?" said Red. The others nodded.

"It's him all right," said Kirk, screwing up his face and nodding his head. "Cinch."

"Trouble is there's no way of making certain till he pulls something," pointed out Slope. "Can't shoot a man on suspicion."

"Well, anyway, we know who to protect ourselves against," chirped up Kirk.

Erik couldn't hear them, but he knew

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that they were talking about him and was pretty sure of what they were saying. He burst out into a rollicking sea song just to show them that he didn't give a damn. It was one he had learned from his whaler father, and he boomed it out in a full, rich baritone:

"Hurrah for the ship and her voyage dread!
Where never before a keel has sped;
Where never before a name was spoken;
By Norway's name is the silence broken."

Red's excited shout rang out across the tundra to interrupt. Erik stopped and turned around. Bruce came running up.

"You damned fool," he stormed. "Don't you know it's bad luck to sing before you eat? Haven't we got enough troubles without you bringing more?" Bruce took his superstitions seriously, and he flushed angrily at Erik's laugh.

"Don't start on Friday! Don't sing before you eat! Go to it, fellow. Maybe you can figure out one that'll act as a curse on these 'busy bugs.'"

They camped that night on a creek in the foothills. Dough-gods and a porcupine Dode had killed with a club made a banquet for every one, including the dog.

A full stomach brought back their spirits and they sat around talking, speculating upon the exact location of Doyle's cabin and the possibilities of Moose and his crowd getting there before they could find it.

"It's on the Meade River drainage, from what he said," offered Bruce. "I didn't get a chance to find out exactly."

"We'll be on the divide at the head of the Meade tomorrow night," said Waller. "I ran a trapline through there a few years ago."

Erik asked a couple of questions about the interior of Alaska in the winter and got only curt monosyllables for answers. Conversation dragged and then Dode Waller came out with a humorous story, always a welcome way to pass time under such conditions. A good laugh is a fine tonic when fagged out.

Each took his turn and when it came to Erik he told his best one in a perfect Scandinavian dialect. No one cracked a smile. Matson gazed into the fire for a moment, then walked over to the bed net stretched safely away from any danger of sparks.

"Guilty as hell," whispered Sam Kirk.

CHAPTER III.

THE CABIN.

DODE WALLER knew the country, all right. They arrived at the divide between the Kitlik and the Meade just before sundown. They had seen caribou on the ridges and a moose in one of the valleys they crossed, but nothing that they could bring down with Bruce's revolver.

"There should be ptarmigan up here," said Waller. "Maybe if we scatter out we can scare up a flock. I have killed 'em with rocks."

"O. K. Let's see what we can find. Who'll make the dough-gods?" said Bruce.

"I will," offered Erik. He picked up the flour and walked down to the creek edge. The others struck off in pairs, two heading each way along the ridge.

Matson had mixed his dough and placed it on the heated stones when he noticed that the dog had left. A quick glance picked him up on the ridge-top. His pointed ears were up and he was looking down into the creek on the other side. Erik whistled.

The dog turned his head for a mo-

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ment, then turned back again. It was as though he was watching something.

Erik's first thought was that he perhaps wanted to follow the hunters, then he realized that they would be far out of sight by this time. Perhaps there was game over there. He ran to the summit, but before he reached it the dog had broken his pose and was cutting straight over into the valley beyond.

Erik whistled shrilly. The dog stopped for only a moment then trotted on. Matson looked puzzled, then all at once his eyes lighted up. The cabin! Sure! That was it! The dog was in familiar territory. Had probably followed Doyle right along this ridge at some time or other. If he could be followed he would lead him directly to the claim. He broke into a run down the hill. The dog kept straight ahead at an easy trot.

When Bruce returned, proudly swinging a brown mottled bird by the legs, he stopped suddenly a few feet from the fire. The blaze was out, only a few coals remaining, and the dough-gods hadn't been turned, though they were burned almost to a crisp.

"Look! Look, Waller, he's gone," he shouted, as Dode appeared. They were still discussing the situation when the other pair of hunters arrived.

"Gone? I'll say he's gone. Probably left the minute we got outta sight," said Kirk.

"We were fools to leave him here alone," said Slope.

"Didn't take the flour," pointed out Dode.

"Why would he?" snapped Red. "Bet a dollar he knows right where the cabin is. There's grub there."

"Grub! Humph! What's he care about grub now? He's out to get the girl and the gold. Then meet Moose." Sam Kirk was righteously indignant.

They talked the whole thing over while the ptarmigan cooked, ate, and then went to bed. At dawn they were scouting along the ridge, looking for smoke to rise through the trees below and trying to figure out which of the numerous small creeks to descend.

No sign of a fire greeted their watchful eyes and they made the tour of two creeks before dark. The next day they would run down two more. The cabin must be close around in that immediate district.

"He distinctly said it was on the head of Meade River," remarked Bruce for the twentieth time. "It's got to be on one of these streams. We'll hunt till we find it."

"And a lot of good that'll do us if the big Scandihoovian got there first," snorted Kirk.

"Or Moose," added Slope.

THEY were just getting ready to pack up when the crashing of brush brought them all to their feet in a hurry. Erik Matson came barging into the circle. His shirt was torn and rents in his veil had been pinned up with thorns. He was puffing hard.

"I saw your smoke from way over on the divide," he said. "Ran all the way so's not to miss you."

"You weren't afraid of missing us when you walked away night before last," said Bruce. His hand hovered close above the gun in the waistband of his overalls.

"Yeah, what's the matter? Couldn't you find the cabin?" asked Sam Kirk with sarcastic inflection.

The look on Eric's face could be interpreted as either surprise or anger.

"Yes," he rapped out. "I found the cabin. The dog led me to it, but Moose and his gang have already been there."

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"What's this you're giving us?" Red's face tightened.

Erik told them how he had followed the dog away from the camp. "I was afraid of losing sight of him and I kept right up with him. You were out of earshot, and there was no way I could leave a message."

"Never heard of scratching one in the dirt, eh?"

"I wouldn't have had time even if I'd thought of it," said Matson. "I stuck with the dog and he led me right to it." He reached down and gave the animal's ears a couple of gentle tugs.

"And Moose Miller's already been there? The girl's gone? The gold?"

"Everything."

"Nice story, Matson," said Bruce. "But I don't think we'll believe too much of it."

"No?"

"No."

"And why not?"

"Too cute a little trick to lead us into the rifles of your pals. Think we don't know why you left us the other night? Bah! What you take us for? Dumb-bells?"

Erik Matson stood and looked at the four of them for a full minute. "I certainly think you're short on brains some place. Listen, I haven't wanted to tip my mitt on this thing, but you're forcing it. Doyle was my uncle—mother was his sister. His trip into Bone City was to meet me on my arrival from the coast. I was to come in here with him, but the day before I arrived Moose Miller tried to get him drunk.

"Doyle took a couple and didn't remember anything that happened. He woke up in one of the rooms over the saloon. Through the thin partition he heard Moose and his men making arrangements to beat him back to the cabin. My uncle figured he must have done some talking, for they knew about the gold. They even mentioned Meade River. He heard them make plans to have one man follow him to the cabin, in case they were wrong about its location, and then do away with him or locate them." Erik stopped for breath and the others seemed to hold theirs as they waited for him to continue.

"HE tried to get up," went on Erik, "but passed out again. That's when I showed up. He was sick as a horse. When Moose had first seen my uncle with the poke he had hinted around about where it came from. Uncle Ben had told him the Kitlik. That word got started around and every one wanted to stampede.

"We knew that there would be a man following him, so Uncle Ben suggested that I stick along without letting any one find out that I was his nephew, or even knew him for that matter. We figured that would be the best way for me to get the bird who was after him. We gave him no chance in Bone City, and knew that he must be one of you three who took passage after us." He took in every one except Bruce with a steady glance.

"One of you fellows know that I am speaking the truth, because I told you where the plans were made; something Bruce never mentioned. Did Uncle Ben tell you that, Bruce?"

"No," Red retorted. "Why didn't you tell us all this back where Doyle died?"

"Because I wanted to find out which man it was. Now you've forced my hand."

"Good story," said Bruce, disbelief in his tone.

"True, every word of it," said Erik.

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"How would I have known all this if it wasn't true?"

"You know but damned little more than I do, and anyway that don't prove anything. As one of Moose's men you'd know all this."

"Sure, and maybe a lot more that you ain't tellin'," said Kirk. "Bet your idea was to follow Doyle in so as to find out for sure where the cabin was in case Moose and the other four missed it."

"Other four? How do you know—" Erik demanded.

"Hell, everybody in Bone City knows how many men hang out with Moose."

"I'd give my right arm to know which one of you fellows to choke," said Erik, angrily.

"You're a good actor, Matson," chipped in Bruce, "but we're taking no chances. Not today."

"Just what do you intend to do if you find Moose without my help?" asked Erik.

"Well, if there isn't any double crossing, I'll dope out some way of getting Doyle's daughter away from him, even if we haven't any guns to fight 'em with."

"Hey! Where'd you get that?" Ed Slope interrupted Bruce with his excited query. His eyes were glued to Erik's hands. The others looked. Matson was calmly rolling a cigarette.

"Where'd you get that tobacco?" repeated the miner. He reached out hungrily. The little that Dode Waller had had in his pocket had lasted them only a day. His own had been spilled into the moss while being dried, and the others had lost theirs with the boat.

Tobacco famine among a bunch of smokers is serious. Now everything else was forgotten as Erik passed the sack and papers around. He explained that he had found it on a high shelf in the cabin—part of Doyle's supply.

Red took a couple of long drags and a smile came to his lips. Then, as his eyes met Matson's again it disappeared.

"Well, that's plenty of proof that you've been at the cabin," he said, "and I'm going to make you take us there. You're going to lead the way, and you'll be just two feet in front of my gun. First funny move on your part, or any sign of an ambush by your pals and I pull the trigger." The two pair of blue eyes locked. "Care to show us where it is?"

"Follow me," said Erik. The dog came to his heels as he started off.

THE cabin sat on a level bench at the edge of a clear rushing stream. Small spruce, barely large enough to cut into cabin logs, clustered around. Canoe birch, tall and lacy of branch, gleamed whitely through the dark green.

A small cache stood on four tall stumps, high out of reach from prowling animals. A "chicken ladder" for reaching the stored supplies—a six inch pole with notches cut every foot—leaned against a tree close by. A few transplanted wild flowers grew along the side of the cabin, and there were curtains of bleached floursacking at the windows.

As they approached, with Erik leading, the dog ran ahead. His hackles were up and he rumbled deep growls.

"Take it easy," cautioned Bruce, and Erik looked back over his shoulder. "If they're waiting for us you're as good as dead," he continued. "I'll drop you first and ask questions afterwards."

"Aw, be your age," flung back Matson. Unhesitating, he led them straight

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to the door, threw it open and stepped inside. The others followed.

The place was in tidy order except for a couple of floor poles that had been pulled up, and the jumble of blankets and robes that had been pulled from the bunk at the back.

"Some one has been here all right," said Red. He glanced into the corner that was curtained off with Indian trade calico. Some feminine apparel hung along the wall. There was a folding canvas cot with a three point Hudson's Bay blanket folded across the foot. A small table-like stand of whipsawed lumber stood in the corner. Besides a brush, comb and other toilet requisites there was a small framed kodak picture of a girl in aviator's helmet with goggles hanging around her neck.

She was showing two even rows of white teeth in a natural smile. Her eyes were large, and her nose just a tiny bit pugged. A curl that looked as if it might be reddish gold peeped out from under the leather helmet. Across one corner in a small round hand was written: "To dear Dad, from Mary."

"Gee, she's a stunner. Wonder if she flies," said Bruce to himself. He stepped back out into the main room. "Find anything?" he asked of the others.

"Couple of thirty-forty shells here, but no sign of a gun around," said Dode.

"One thing certain, they're heading downstream," remarked Matson. "I've been all over the country up the creek hunting for you fellows, and there's no sign of any one having gone through."

No one answered him, and then Sam Kirk spoke up. "Here's some rice and dried apples. Let's cook up a feed. Some powdered eggs and dried milk, too. Boy! Let's eat."

"Never mind cooking now," snapped out Bruce. "Get some of the stuff together in a pack. Don't let's waste time here."

"What do you think we best do?" asked Dode.

"Get on their trail."

"We could never catch them," said Erik. "They're at least a couple of days ahead."

"Well, we'll never get 'em waiting here. They're afoot and pretty well loaded down. Sixty thousand in gold dust, Doyle said." Red rolled himself a cigarette half the size of a cigar.

"Would that hold 'em back much?" asked Erik.

"Well, it's around two hundred and forty pounds. Take that with their rifles, grub and other junk and they'll have load enough. We'll strike out light. See if we can catch up with 'em."

"Then what?" grinned Kirk sardonically. "Throw stones at 'em?"

"There's always a way of doing things if you go about it right," snapped back Red. "Bring a couple of those pots."

"These would make good weapons at close quarters." Dode held up a couple of lengths of heavy drill steel, then tossed them back under the bunk again.

"Doyle must have been a quartz prospector," said Slope. "Just goes to show you. Hunting for a lead and finding a paystreak. I swear to God I'll quit this mining game cold some of these days."

BRUCE snapped the bunch into action and they were soon on their way down the creek bank. He still kept Erik close in front of him, and his revolver handy. "We ain't out of the woods yet," he said.

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There was an old trail, probably the one Doyle had used when he freighted his stuff in with dogs during the winter. Here and there where it left the soft moss and ran across bare ground they could see the marks of numerous feet. Red noticed particularly that one track was left by a very small moccasin-soled pac. That would be Mary. His mind kept darting back to the picture he had seen at the cabin.

That night Erik slept between Bruce and Dode, and Red openly warned the others to keep a continual eye on Matson. "You may be leading us into something," he said, "but there is nothing to do except take a chance, now that we know Moose is down the river here some place with the girl and the gold."

Erik snorted. "Honest, Bruce," he said, "this dog here shows more intelligence than you do sometimes."

"Yeah?"

"Sure. You can't fool a dog. He knows when a guy is right. Notice his hackles come up when he got a sniff of the other tracks around the cabin."

"Well, I'm banking on my own judgment this time." Red winked broadly at the others.

Mile after mile they trudged down the stream that next day. They mushed as fast as they could and there wasn't much talking. The trees were increasing in size and their shade was welcome to the perspiring men as they hurried along.

It was a little after noon that they stopped for a bite of the cold food they carried along. Bruce reached for a pinch of salt they had brought from the cabin. He was about to sprinkle it on a leg of ptarmigan when a small brush caught his sleeve. It spilled into the deep moss.

Red cursed and tried to pick it up, but it sifted down. "Damn it," he said, "I can't get enough of it to throw over my left shoulder. Now what do you suppose is going to happen?"

"Probably fall and break a leg," suggested Slope.

"Bad luck of some kind as sure as hell. See if it isn't." Every one smiled, but Bruce was really serious.

He mentioned the accident again after they had been on the trail half an hour. He was about to tell of a case he knew when something happened that drove all thoughts of the spilled salt from his mind.

HE stopped suddenly, cocked one ear into the upstream breeze.

"What's that? Hear it? Hold her there a minute, Matson."

"I don't hear anything. Oh, yes, I do," said Dode.

"Sounds like sawing."

"And there goes an ax."

Bruce stepped up and nudged Erik. "Come on. Let's see what's going on down here."

When they came close to where some one was working ahead of them Red made a suggestion. "We'll cut back onto the hillside above them. Get a better look than trying to sneak up in this timber." He told Erik to drop behind him now.

"Here," he said, unthreading his belt and slipping a loop over the dog's head, "hold him, and don't let him yip. No. Better let you take care of him, Waller." And then to Erik again: "What I said before we got to the cabin goes here, too, Matson. If that's Moose and his gang and you give our presence away I'm going to let you have it if it's the last act of my life."

Very quietly he led the way at an angle up the hillside. Then he held out a hand for every one to stop. The sound of the sawing was quite loud now, and

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once there came to them the sound of coarse laughter. Red crawled to the edge of some underbrush, looked down onto the flat below, then crept back.

"They're whip-sawing," he said in a low tone.

"Getting out lumber for a boat," suggested Dode.

"Sure. They came down here to make it. Plenty water here and bigger timber. There's a kind of a wicki-up there and a guy marching back and forth with a rifle."

"That's where they're holding the girl then," said Slope.

"Sure," said Bruce, "and I think there's a chance of sneaking up on it from the back. If I can—here, where you going, Kirk?" He hadn't raised his voice, but there was a brittle explosive timbre to it. His eyes were like tempered steel.

Sam was offended. "Cripes sake," he said, "I'm just moving down here so's I can get a look."

"Well, come back up out of that thick brush. I'll do all the looking. Stick right here with us. Looked a hell of a lot to me like you was getting ready for a dash down the hillside." Bruce's words were clipped, hard.

Sam Kirk sniffed. "Every move looks suspicious to you."

Red recognized the truth of this, and apologized. "But now you fellows stick right here, together. I'm going to see what the situation is. Lie low and keep quiet." He took the belt end from Dode and tied the dog close up to a small birch just above them.

"If the girl's there I'll take a chance on trying to get her away. We can't attack without guns," said Erik.

"You'd like to get down there, wouldn't you?" came back Red. "Fine chance to give the alarm. Well, I'll take care of your dear *cousin* if she's there." He bent low and slipped to the cover of a bush down the hill. Then, on his belly, he crawled to the protection of another. In a couple of minutes he was out of sight.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ENEMY CAMP.

FOOT by foot Bruce made his way down toward the camp. He came to an open space of about twenty feet. While waiting for the guard to turn his back so that he could slip across he took in everything his eyes could reach.

On high notched stumps lay two stringers, and on them a fair sized log that had been barked. One man stood on flattened poles that paralleled the log and lifted on the long saw. Another stood below, dragging the steel blade down. A slow, laborious way of making lumber.

Another man was putting the boat together near the bank of the stream. The sound of his hammer rang clear and sharp. Must have brought the tools and nails down from Doyle's, thought Bruce.

The guard turned and Red slipped across the open space. Now he was almost ready for a dash to the wicki-up. It was nothing more than a sloping frame reaching from the ground in back to a height of about six feet in front, and covered closely with flat branches. Other limbs were piled up to close off the triangular sides.

Bruce gave his gun a quick once-over and crawled to the edge of the shielding brush. He waited while the guard walked over toward the saw-pit, and was just ready to dash thirty feet to where he could hide back of the wicki-up when a man he hadn't seen

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before stepped into view. Red's heart stopped. The man was coming straight toward him.

He was a big man, thick, wide and heavy. His mosquito veil was rolled onto the rim of his hat, exposing a face that would have made a fortune playing brute parts in Hollywood.

The eyes were small, piggish, and overhung with shaggy dun-colored brows. The nose was a shapeless blob that seemed to form part of his upper lip. His mouth was down-drawn at the corners and formed a half circle streak through a ragged stubble the same color as his brows and the matted hair which showed in the open V of his dirty gray flannel shirt.

Moose Miller. Bruce recognized him by the description Dode had given. He hardly breathed as the man advanced toward him. He thought of moving a few inches to put a big spruce between them, but decided against it.

Miller was carrying something in a chunk of birch bark that had been folded into a basket. He was less than fifteen feet from Red when he reached up and tore a piece of spruce gum from the trunk of the big tree. Welcome breath seeped back into Bruce's lungs. He hadn't been seen after all. Moose was just gathering spruce gum for the seams of the boat.

He was waiting for Moose to get farther away when he saw him stop and grin at some one in the wicki-up. "Well, my pretty one," he smirked, "how goes the beauty sleep?"

Bruce's blood ran hot, throbbed like drums in his temples. That was Mary Doyle Moose was looking at like that. Well, with any kind of luck he could get her out. Fortunately the guard was making a long circular beat, giving most of his attention to a careful scanning of the river and trail. That meant that the girl would be tied up.

Bruce felt to make sure he had his knife, then slipped quickly over and flattened himself in the deep moss at the back of the shelter. He peeked through an opening in the branches and then spread them to admit his head.

THE girl was lying on her side with her back to him. He could see her small fists with the turns of light rope cutting into her wrists above them. Her feet were also bound. Over her, and through the open front he could see Moose talking to the guard.

"Mary," he whispered.

The girl gave a startled gasp, turned her head and threw herself into a sitting posture. Her eyes were wide with surprise.

"Back down," he ordered. "Don't attract their attention."

The girl obeyed immediately and Red spread the branches so that he could get both shoulders and arms through. He kept his nose down into the moss so that her body would shield him in case they happened to look that way.

"We'll have to wait till they move over to one side," he whispered. "Just take it easy. I'll get you out of here."

"Who are you? Where's father?" The smothered words were freighted with concern.

"I'm a friend; quiet, now! There, they're moving away." He crawled in a little farther and slashed the cords on her wrists. His head was close to hers and her hair brushed his cheek as he reached. He noticed that his guess, when looking at the picture, was just about right. If anything it was a little on the reddish side.

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He saw her rub her aching wrists against the back of her light-weight plaid cruiser jacket. As it tightened around her it brought out the rounded curves of her trim figure. He was dying for another look at her face, but dared not raise his head.

"Now try and throw your feet around here closer," he told her. "Soon as I can cut them free throw your arms back over your head. I'll back out and pull you with me . . . Have they hurt you?"

"No, thank God. They've been too busy working, and the men made Moose agree to leave me alone until they were out of here safe. Hurry!" she whispered.

Bruce was just stretching the last inch to get his knife blade under the ropes when wild yelping sounded out front. The reddish gray malemute swept into view, passed the wicki-up a few feet, then turned with his nose to the ground.

"Buster!" Mary's voice wasn't loud enough to carry, but the dog's yelping had attracted all the attention that was necessary. Bruce saw Moose and the guard come running just as the dog leaped in and yipped with delight at finding his mistress.

Red cursed under his breath. He tried to tell the girl that he'd make another attempt, but the noise the dog was making drowned it out. He backed hastily through the hole in the branches as the two men appeared in front.

For just a second he considered dropping them with his revolver, then realized that he would never be able to kill five men with two shots. Failure to get the whole gang would mean worse than death for the girl. He ducked low and ran up the hillside.

A loose rock slipped under his feet and went tumbling down. A second later there was a sharp report behind him and dirt kicked up just ahead. Two more shots came in rapid succession, and then one found his thigh. It felt like a hot skewer, but fortunately missed the bone.

He was in thicker brush now and the firing ceased. He felt the warm blood ooze down into his shoe as he gained the point where he had left the others. He caught a glimpse of one ahead and raced on to catch up with them. He had only a fleeting glimpse of the belt tied to the small birch, but it was enough to show him that the slip loop had been pulled over the dog's head.

Red anger boiled up as he realized that releasing the dog had been a deliberate act. He cursed aloud as he raced along.

WHEN he caught up with the others they all stopped to catch their breaths. Shouts sounded down along the slope. Red was determined to find out who had turned the dog loose, and even as they stood puffing he demanded to know. His eyes accused them all, then whipped back and forth between Erik and Sam Kirk. Evidently that little stunt of creeping away back there had had its effect, for Kirk came in for a long stare as Bruce waited the answer.

"I was watching for you," said Slope. "The dog was behind us. I never noticed until he appeared 'way down in front, running and yipping."

"Me neither," offered Dode. "But come on, let's get the hell outta here. They're working over this way." They struck off at a trot and didn't stop until a mile or more upstream, and in thick timber far back from the trail. They all sat down and Bruce took up his query again.

"I thought I told you all to hang to-

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gether there. What the hell am I up against here, anyway? A conspiracy? How could one of you turn the dog loose without the others seeing it?"

"Well, we were moving around a little," said Erik. "All trying to see what was going on down below. I guess it would have been possible for some one to slip the belt over his head if he did it fast enough."

"Obviously, some one did," stormed Bruce. "Damned funny! Just as I was about to free her, too."

Darkness fell and they were still arguing. Their nerves were on edge. There was a near fight between Erik and Red. Dode stopped it and said: "Listen, talking is getting us no place; I'm going back there and see what the lay is."

Bruce looked at him for a moment and nodded his head. He had no suspicions about Waller, and, anyway, the time was past when he could be too finicky about letting one of the gang go off by himself.

They wished him luck, and at the last minute Red handed him the revolver. "There are two bullets in it," he said. "Don't use them unless you have to . . . then make them count."

Dode nodded and slipped off. He was gone what seemed hours to those waiting under the trees. Suddenly they heard the dog bark. Almost instantly came a fusillade of rifle shots, and the sound of excited voices. Then silence.

Time dragged on, until it was almost midnight. Waller appeared beside them before they knew he was near.

"Not a chance in the world," said the trapper. "I was almost into the camp, but they're guarding that wickiup like nobody's business. Big fires, and sentries standing constant watch. Moose was raising hell about the attempt you made, Bruce, and the whole outfit was in an argument. I kind of gathered that they're all afraid of another attempt now that the boat's almost finished—they sure peppered the bush with their rifles when that darned dog sniffed me out. I wanted to stick a little longer, but there was no chance. I did find out, though, that Doyle's daughter is safe so far. Part of 'em are going to stand guard while the others sleep, and turn about. They'll be too worried about us to bother her till they get down to the Yukon, where the gang is figuring on splitting up for a while."

"Good try, Dode," said Red. "I figure you're right about the girl. That's part of the load off our minds anyway. What we've got to do is figure some way of getting Moose before they shove off in that boat."

"Fat chance," said Sam.

Red whipped a cold eye at Kirk, but before he could say anything Erik had offered to take the gun and try to take Mary away, guards or no guards.

Bruce quickly nipped that suggestion in the bud. It was evident that he wasn't willing to take any chances on Matson.

CHAPTER V.

THE TRAITOR.

NEXT morning they slipped past the camp and came out on the river bank below. "There must be some way we can head Moose off," said Red as they stopped for a rest. There was a note in his voice, though, that belied the confidence of his words.

"If we could only run across some prospectors or Indians and get their rifles," said Waller.

"I'd take a chance if we could only get hold of one," put in Bruce.

"My suggestion is to forget it," crabbed Kirk.

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"Forget hell," snapped back Red. "I'm not through with Moose Miller yet. Come on, we might run into some one with a rifle. No good sitting here talking."

About ten miles below Moose's camp they stopped on a high rock bluff that bordered a deep and narrow gorge. A hundred feet below them the water whipped along its bed at a good stiff speed. A part of the other cliff had split off and half dammed the river.

Bruce was sitting thoughtfully silent while the others discussed building a raft and floating down to the Yukon. Dode was taking no part in the talk until the three had just about decided upon trying it.

"There's nothing more we can do about the Doyle girl now," said Kirk. "Might as well get out of the country here while we got a chance."

"You'd have no chance in that water down there on any raft we could build," said Dode. "No auger to pin the logs together, and no rope. Willows wouldn't hold in that twisty current."

"Yeah, well, I'd be willing to take a chance," said Sam.

"Where'd you get the logs? You haven't got beaver teeth, have you?"

Red suddenly slapped his knee and started looking around at the rock bluff on which they sat. "Say," he said, "it wouldn't take much to tear the face off this cliff. Water has collected in some of these cracks and frozen. There are lots of splits."

"You mean dam the river?" asked Sam.

"I mean loosen up enough of this big stuff so that it'll clutter up the channel. You know what it did to us. Well, why couldn't we fix it so it would do the same for Moose?"

Slope, who had jumped to his feet at Bruce's first words and had walked back and forth along the edge, shook his head. "Couldn't budge 'em without long bars and leverage," he said. "But, boy, what I couldn't do with a few sticks of dynamite. Say! I've got it!" His eyes lighted up as he dropped a hand on Red's shoulder.

"Remember those pieces of drill steel that Waller dragged out from under the bunk? The ones he said would make good weapons in close quarters? Well, did you notice the bits?"

Bruce shook his head.

"Did you?" asked Slope of Waller.

"I looked at 'em, sure. Why? What do you mean?"

"What color were they? The bits, the cutting edges?"

"Oh, kind of bluish. Been tempered, I guess."

"Of course they'd been tempered. *And never been used.*"

Every eye was on Slope's face. They waited.

"Get the idea? Doyle brought those in with him for quartz prospecting and evidently found his placer diggings before he ever used them. Well, drills are no good without powder, so there must be some dynamite around that cabin some place. Maybe in that high cache."

THEY talked the proposition over in excited, jumbled sentences. It was decided to have a look around Doyle's place.

"I'll go," said Erik. "No use all of us traipsing clear back there."

"You're right on that," said Red, "but it won't be you."

"Cripes, you still got that in your head, have you?" Erik shrugged his shoulders and sat down apart from the others. "Bruce," he said, "if you were fifty pounds heavier, I'd be tempted to give you a damned good thrashing."

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"Don't let that stop you," barked Red.

"Cut out the guff," said Dode. "How about me, Bruce? I can make it up there and back as fast as any of you." And they all knew that was only half of it. Dode Waller was a trail eater. His long, straight legs would carry him away from any of them.

"Sure. Go ahead," said Bruce. "Make it as snappy as you can. I couldn't tell for sure, but I think those two boards that a fellow carried from the pit yesterday were the top side pieces. Probably thwarts and paddle timber they were whipping out this morning."

"I noticed a hammer, an eight-pound double-jack, standing in front of the cabin," said Slope. "Don't forget the caps and the fuse, they'll be around some place. Bring three pieces of steel, a short starter, a three footer, and anything he has there longer."

"O. K. I'll be back when you see me." Dode Waller left them at a swinging jog that burned up distance. The rest dropped down off the bluff at the lower end of the gorge and made camp.

Bruce and Slope looked the ground over. There was a narrow ledge along the bottom that was too broken up to be a trail, though they managed to scramble along it and pick out the place where they wanted to drop the big slabs from above.

That evening Sam Kirk said that he thought the whole idea was goofy. Never get enough rock off the face of that cliff to clog the river.

"How about Mary?" asked Erik. "You wreck the boat, you wreck her. Kind of a risk, isn't it?"

"I doped that out before I ever mentioned the scheme." Bruce's voice showed his irritation. "Slow water just below. Deep, but sluggish. We can save her easily."

Before they went to sleep that night Red took Slope off to the side. "Let's keep 'em between us," he said. "And one eye open. I got a hunch that one of those two birds is going to try and warn Moose."

DAYLIGHT proved the error of Bruce's judgment. No one had made a move during the night. They spent the day prying loose small chunks of broken rock with poles of driftwood. "Every little bit helps," said Red.

Just before dark Dode Waller showed up. He had everything they needed and had made the round trip without stopping. He was dead on his feet, but wouldn't admit it.

"They were pitching the seams when I sneaked past," he said. "Looks like they might be ready to leave in the morning."

"I'll try a couple of 'crack' shots right now," said Slope. Any one could see that he knew powder the way he went about his work. Deep into a frost seam he drove the sixty per cent dynamite with a long thin stick. Three different times he carefully sized up the face of the bluff. "She'll break right there," he said, indicating a place that carried marks only his trained eye could read. He split the end of the coil of fuse and cut off a little more than enough to reach from the charge to the top of the rock. He slipped the fuse into the hollow end of the fulminate cap and stuck it in his mouth. A quick bite of his strong teeth crimped it solidly on.

"That makes the chills run up and down my back," said Erik. "I saw one of those caps go off once in a kitchen stove."

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Slope grinned. "Like to have a penny for every time I've done it. Never missed yet."

"That's obvious," said Erik.

Ed split the side of a stick of powder with his knife and forced a hole into it with a small stick. Into the hole he set the cap and then tied the fuse and dynamite together with a shred torn from his handkerchief. He dropped it down and pressed it firmly against the main charge.

"All right, take a walk, you fellows." He drew some matches from his pocket and waited till they were a safe distance. He joined them on the run, with the spitting fuse sending out its little wreath of smoke behind him.

There was a dull jar, only about half the noise the others expected, and a piece of rock the size of a hotel room at the top, but wedging out at the bottom, slid off into space. The crash of its fall shook the earth. Spray mounted halfway up the cliff face. The river churned and boiled its angry way around the new obstruction.

Slope moved another by stuffing a frost crack, but the result wasn't entirely successful. There was still plenty of room down there for a boat to pass.

"Here's where he need the drills," said Ed. "I'll have to blow this shoulder off. There's enough slide at the bottom now to shunt it out far enough into the water." It was getting dark and he struck matches as he crawled over the jutting rock looking for the lines of cleavage. Finally he had marked the locations for four holes. "It'll take that to move her," he explained and got Erik to hold the starter for the first.

As he stood there against the dying light of the sky, swinging the head of the hammer to the dead center of the steel every blow, he made a silhouette of rhythmic motion.

Every muscle did its part, not one ounce of unnecessary effort was expended. The drill bit deep into the solid granite. Down, down it chewed, spitting out its gray dust.

A MOON rose, and in its pale light they took turns at twisting and striking, but it was the blows of Ed Slope's trick on the hammer that ate into the rock.

Every one protested when Dode Waller insisted upon doing his share. It didn't do a bit of good. He had mushed for over thirty hours straight, and had carried back with him the heavy drills, dynamite, spoons and hammer. Still he had a reserve to draw upon.

The threat of the finished boat drove them to the utmost of their strength. One hole reached the depth that Slope desired. Then another. And a third. The eastern sky brightened up. While Slope was spooning out the first cuttings of the last hole Red said, "Well, we got her beat now. Those three will probably tear off enough if we don't have time to get this other down."

Ed shook his head. "Nope," he said. "I've put the holes their limit apart. It'll take the four of them to crack this shoulder off clear across, and if it doesn't crack clear across our work is lost." No one disputed his judgment.

Erik took the hammer and put everything he had behind the blows, but they weren't landing as true as Slope's had fallen. Matson worked like a Trojan, though; pounding, pounding, not giving up till the hammer was taken away from him.

Finally Red almost had a fight with Dode to get him to go down to the camp. The boy was groggy from exhaustion. At last he consented to go, and Bruce sent Sam Kirk along, too, with instructions to put on a pot of rice

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for breakfast. They were all ravenously hungry.

Slope, Red and Erik drove themselves to the limit. Slowly the hole sank into the rock. The sun winked over the hills and awakened the rest of the world. A camp robber sailed to the top of a dead snag on happy wings, sat there and preened his blended black and gray feathers. A lone goose shot swiftly down above the gorge and then stretched his long neck in the direction of a distant lake.

More often now the three on the rock cast anxious glances up the river. Sweat dropped in great beads from big Erik's chin. His powerful arms worked like the walking beam of a river steamer. At last the hole was down. Slope loaded the four with the last of the dynamite. "If there's a misfire we're licked," he said. Bruce and Erik moved down the brink toward camp as Ed prepared to touch them off.

Suddenly a hoarse shout from Erik drew Red's eyes. Matson was pointing down to the narrow strip along the water's edge. The figure of a man hurrying upstream over the jagged rocks was plainly visible even in the shadow of the cliff.

"Who's that?" he cried. "Hey, Slope, hold her! Hold her!"

"Too late," Slope shouted as he came running toward them. "They were all lit and below the tops of the holes."

Erik and Bruce both bellowed warnings to the man below. They saw him look up. Watched him scramble madly over the rocks. He was directly under the shoulder when the charges cracked her off like a knife. They stood transfixed. The man below disappeared in a fountain of spray that reached up through the shadow of bluff and danced for a second in the light of the rising sun. The rock closed the gap.

The three men looked at each other. "Kirk. Trying to reach Moose Miller," said Bruce. "It was him, then." He turned to Erik, stuck out his hand. "Matson, I owe you an apology. A hundred of them. You were right about the dog."

"Aw, forget it." Their hands clung together and for the first time in days Erik's big, square-toothed grin lit up his face.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WRECK.

DODE was dead to the world when they reached the camp. They told him what had happened. He rubbed his eyes and yawned tremendously. "Serves him right, the rat. You know, that guy gave me the creeps this morning the way he kept looking at me after we got back here. Must have been waiting for me to fall asleep."

"The shoulder fell right where Ed said it would," Bruce told him, and sleepy as Dode was he gave a whooping cheer. He peered upstream. "Call me when she comes around the bend up there at the head of the rapids. That'll be too late for Mr. Moose, and I want to be in on the killing."

"O. K.," grinned Erik, stripping down to his underwear. "We're going to wait right here till it happens. I'm ready to rescue all the fair damsels in the country. Even my cousin."

"That's right, she is your cousin, isn't she?" grinned Bruce. He had felt a moment's twinge of jealousy at Erik's eagerness to be the rescuer.

"Do I have to tell you that again?"

The reaction of the work, and the success of the last shot had them in the buoyant spirits that so often come with nerve tension. Red was the first to calm

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down to a sober outlook on the trap they had set.

He was ready to jump in, and the sun touched a rosy glow to his white torso and freckled shoulders. He stood up, clothed only in his shorts, and gazed fixedly at the bend above.

"If Mary gets hurt in this deal," he said, "I'll keep right on swimming, down to the Yukon, out into the Bering."

"There she is," shouted Slope, peeling off his shirt. "And coming like a bat out of hell. That water's faster than it looks, mister."

Dode was on his feet. They crowded to the water's edge. "Every one keep an eye out for Mary," said Red. There was an unfamiliar quaver in his voice. With the shooting of the boat around the bend he had come suddenly to a full realization of the stake at hand, and the extreme measures they were using. A promise to a dead man. Yes. But it was more than that now. Much more, since he had seen her; since her hair had brushed his cheek there in the wicki-up.

"The first one to reach her grab her," he cried. "Every one else dig in and give him a hand. Let Moose and his so-and-sos go to hell." He stood tense on a rock, waiting.

The heavy boat of green lumber was riding deep with its load of six. It was hard to handle and, without power, practically at the mercy of the current. Its nose struck, it swung. Then when its stern came around it seemed that it was going to make it through the widest gap. Red held his breath.

There was a thump as the stern struck. He could see the startled faces of the men as they were thrown into the water when the boat heeled over. He didn't see Mary till he caught a glimpse of a plaid cruiser shirt. He was in after it ten feet ahead of any of the others.

MARY had just righted herself and was striking for shore when he reached her. A head that he didn't recognize popped up right beside them. Red was slipping past and he glanced over his shoulder into a pair of startled, sea-green eyes. He let loose with a stiff backward kick. His heel smacked solidly against the whiskered face, but he tore open the angry red hole in his thigh.

The water was quite slow here and he waved away the offers of help from the others. Mary was swimming easily with one arm while he held her by the other and drove them ahead with powerful strokes. A head that looked like a wet wolfskin was bearing down on them. When the face turned with the roll of a full crawl stroke he saw a blob of a nose and small, piggish eyes. The man was a powerful swimmer and would reach them with a couple more reaches of his heavy arms.

Something white and fast slipped by him and Red got a quick glimpse of Erik's face. The lips were drawn back from his dice-like teeth. He heard the two come together right behind him.

Off to the side, Ed Slope was wrestling with a limp figure that appeared unmanageable. Dode Waller was hurrying to his aid. Bruce bent all his efforts to get Mary ashore as quickly as possible. Their feet touched gravel, they splashed out and up to the fire. Buster, already ashore, yelped joyfully.

For the count of ten they stood looking into one another's eyes. A bellowed curse drew their gaze to the stretch of almost flat shingle just below. Erik and Moose were out of the water, on their feet, and fighting. The

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smack of a fist into Erik's bare, wet ribs sounded like a pistol shot.

"Sit tight," Red called over his shoulder to the girl. When ten feet from the fighters Matson landed a blow flush on Moose's chin. The thug teetered back on his heels, fell. Erik motioned Bruce away. "Get out of here. Leave me alone," he yelled. "I'm gonna have some fun." And then, to Miller: "Get on your feet, you skunk."

Moose was up with surprising speed for one of his bulk and build. Toe to toe they stood, both landing square, sledgehammer blows. It was about even until Erik put over a one-two that rocked Miller, then Moose suddenly wheeled. His huge body snapped away from Matson. He rose sharply to the toe of his left boot and his right leg whipped upward and back in a vicious kick.

It was the *savate* of the Canadian lumber camps, the most devastating blow one man can give another, but instead of Moose's heel connecting with Matson's chin, it struck his chest.

Erik was knocked staggering backwards. He recaptured his balance and let out a bellow of rage. He leaped and grasped Moose around the waist. All rules for fair fighting were out, now. Everything went after the *savate*. Roaring like a bull, he picked Miller up bodily and slammed him to the gravel. He turned him, twisted him, held him up and mauled him three times in the face. Red streaks appeared across his back and shoulders where Moose clawed blindly for a hold.

Erik was mad; as mad as mortal man can be. His balance wheel—the one that had controlled his temper against Red's suspicions and insinuations—was now running riot. He was berserk, and his anger-tempered muscles stood out like cables all over his healthy body. They snapped Moose around as though he weighed less than a hundred, instead of a full two and a quarter. Moose Miller took the licking of his life. Took it and liked it, and when it was over lay on the gravel like something dead.

MATSON grasped a foot and dragged him up to the fire as one might tow a seal over ice by a flipper. Dode and Slope ran up, leaving their limp burden with his feet awash. "Fine work, Erik," shouted Waller. "Wish you'd had ahold of this baby with me." He jerked his head to indicate the man who lay stretched out at the edge of the water. "Dead as a doornail, yet it was all the two of us could do after I pulled him up from the bottom to keep him afloat."

"Oh, I know why," said Mary. She was standing with her arm around her cousin's waist. Her wet hair hung in a thick, reddish gold veil over her shoulders.

"They had a big fight last night and split up the gold dust. They were all afraid of each other after the boat was finished and each man sewed his share up in a canvas belt and tied it around his waist. All except Moose; he had another man's share, too, and he kept the boot. Each man got six hundred and fifty ounces."

"Holy snakes! Six hundred and fifty troy ounces!" repeated Dode. "All of fifty pounds! No wonder! Come on, Slope, we've got to go diving for the gold."

"And there's a long rope with a big chunk of wood tied to the boat," said the girl. "It was in the boat."

"Old stunt, serves as a buoy in case of an upset," said Bruce. "We'll get that, too." He had just jumped into his clothes behind a clump of bushes, but

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now with the gold salvage question brought up he turned back, fumbling with the front of his shirt. Suddenly he let out a yell that snapped every head around. He was standing there with a most awful expression on his face. He was white as a sheet.

"What's the matter? What happened?" asked Mary, running up.

"I can't dive," he said. "Wouldn't dare to. I put my shirt on wrong side out and I can't change it or take it off. Worst luck in the world!"

Erik roared. "You two sit down there by the fire and let me take care of the diving."

Bruce seated Mary on a log and stirred up a blaze. He looked down into her eyes for a moment and then blurted out. "Do you fly?"

"Think I'm an angel?" laughed the girl. Red joined her.

"I mean I saw a picture back there in the cabin and you had on a flying helmet."

"I knew what you meant," said Mary. "I was just kidding. Yes, I fly. My mother's brother owns a commercial airport at the town where I went to school."

Red leaped clear over the fire and dug into his bed. "Ever see this book? Best there is. Found it once in an old wrecked plane. I've never had a ride yet, but I'm a gas engine expert and I'm learning all about it." Launched on his favorite subject, and with an understanding audience, he raced on at miles per hour. "I'm bugs about planes," he said, "and this is the greatest country on earth for 'em."

TWO weeks later they were all sitting at a laden table in Bone City's finest café. Mary's cheeks were flushed and her eyes were like stars. She was smiling happily, for only two hours before she had won the hardest argument she ever had or hoped to have.

She had had to get mad, stamp her feet, and pretend that she was going to cry before she could convince the boys that an even division of all the gold dust was the only thing she'd listen to. She had finally made it stick, but it had taken her the full two weeks since the wreck to bring it about. Now they were having their farewell meal together. All business was settled, even to the selling of the claim on Meade River.

"Now let's forget these past troubles and let each one tell what his plans are for the future, what he's going to do with his stake. How's that? You first, Erik."

"Well, I know an old saltery down on Malataka Inlet that I can buy for a song and build into a big salmon cannery. That's where I'm heading for."

"And you, Dode?"

"Well, I guess I know fur as well as anything else, and I'm wise to a swell little island where I can start a blue fox ranch."

Ed Slope spoke up without being asked. "My money goes on deposit in the Northern Commercial Company, to be used only for grubstakes. I'm going to dig till I hit it."

Every one looked at Bruce, but his eyes were on Mary's. "I guess I'll have to speak for him," she said. "He's so darned bashful around women. Mr. Bruce is going to start the A. C. (Red) Bruce Commercial Airway Company. With headquarters in Bone City and planes running to every part of Alaska. He just came from the jail where he bought Moose Miller's cabin for his office." A black muzzle reached up over the table edge. Mary patted it.

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"Buster here is going to be the line's mascot."

"And now how about you, Mary?" asked Erik with one of his wide grins.

Mary blushed becomingly. "Well," she said, "I'm going to be a partner in the Bruce Airways."

"Partner, did you say?" Erik's brows rose in mock surprise.

"Sure. Partner. What's more valuable on this earth than a real partner?" She was suddenly very serious. "Haven't you fellows been through enough to realize that? Haven't we all been through enough? Aren't we all partners? Here. Everybody grip hands together. There. Now if any one of us gets into trouble he's to call on all the others, and all the others are to respond. We're *partners all.*"

They held the grip for a silent moment, then, as they drew their hands back, Red's sleeve hooked a fork and knocked it to the floor.

"Holy smoke!" he cried. "Look at that! I'll bet any one ten dollars that our first ship gets cracked up on her maiden flight. Talk about luck!"

Mary reached over and gave him a kiss on the cheek. "Honey," she laughed, "I'll break you of those superstitions if it takes a century."

Red looked happily at her. "You're all the luck I'll ever need."

THE END.

Mr. Spider, Pioneer Balloonist

"WHO were the first balloonists?"

If we should ask this question of some one versed in the history of aëronautics, he would probably answer:

"A rooster, a duck and a sheep! They went up in the balloon made by the Montgolfier brothers in France, about 1783."

He would be wrong, however. The first balloonists were not barnyard denizens, nor men. They were spiders. Spiders that spun a few threads of silk, let upward currents of air lift them, then spun a few more threads, and so on until the upward pull was enough to drag the little creatures from their stand atop a rock or a tree. Then off they would go with the wind, sometimes traveling for hundreds of miles across ocean waters, carrying the strain of the spider family into the far corners of the world. Today, according to naturalists, there is not a place on earth, except the farthest north and south and the tops of the highest mountains, that does not have at least one species of spider inhabiting it.

Until a few years ago it was thought the "gossamer" spider was the only aviator in the family. (He was called gossamer from the appearance of his silky webs when, brought to earth by winds or rains, they lay upon the trees and earth.) Now, however, it is known that practically all branches of the order distribute themselves throughout the earth in this manner. Although the older spiders frequently go "ballooning," according to naturalists, it is the young, new-born ones that travel the most. In the fall when they first break from their cocoons, the little fellows throw their strands into the winds. Impelled by the trade winds into which they are often drawn, they float out to sea for miles and often reach islands and atolls many days distant from steamship lanes.

Colin K. Cameron.

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On Ice

By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

Author of "Hard Gold," "His Second Ship," etc.

"I wheel 'em into the grave," Sandy Green's auto racing enemy told him, "and that's where you're going!"

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

SOME EASY MONEY.

BOUNDLESS confidence, a hundred and seven dollars and a home-made racing car that would wheel were all that young Sandy Green and old Ham Collins brought to the dirt track at the Kane County Fair Grounds. And at the end of the day they still had the car—almost.

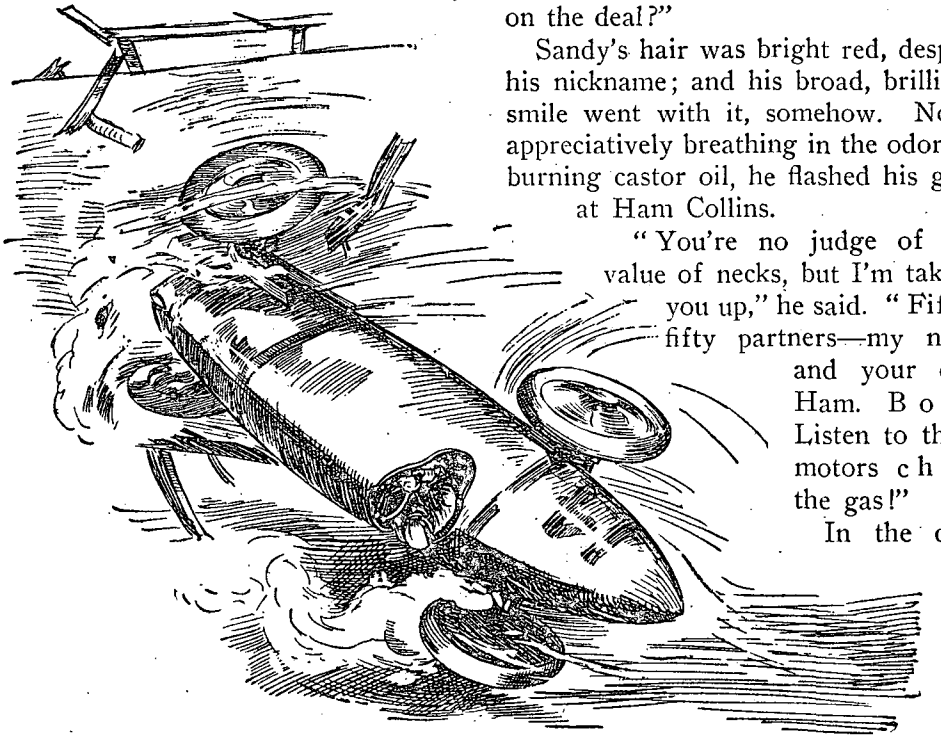
It wasn't hard to break into that outlaw circuit. Raw material was always in demand. Sandy Green, the pilot of the organization, filled that description adequately. It was Sandy who supplied the boundless confidence, besides thirty-five dollars cash. Ham Collins, who had crawled under other men's racing machines from the sands of Daytona to the boards of Los Angeles, supplied the car. Also seventy-two dollars.

"Of course we're fifty-fifty partners," old Ham Collins assured Sandy. "Aren't you throwing your neck in on the deal?"

Sandy's hair was bright red, despite his nickname; and his broad, brilliant smile went with it, somehow. Now, appreciatively breathing in the odor of burning castor oil, he flashed his grin at Ham Collins.

"You're no judge of the value of necks, but I'm taking you up," he said. "Fifty-fifty partners—my neck and your car, Ham. Boy! Listen to those motors chew the gas!"

In the dust



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and turmoil that hung over the grassy edge of the track opposite the gaunt, unpainted grandstand, only one man appeared to notice the advent of the new team. This gentleman was so short that he looked as if he might actually fit into the tiny bucket seat of one of the diminutive racing cars.

He was the only individual present who seemed to have nothing to do. Everybody else, hot, sweat-drenched and bothered, was either gassing a car, shifting a wheel, making delicate but momentous adjustments of carburetors, arguing with the frenzied starter or listening to some high speed and supertemperamental racing motor throw convulsions of energy and uproar.

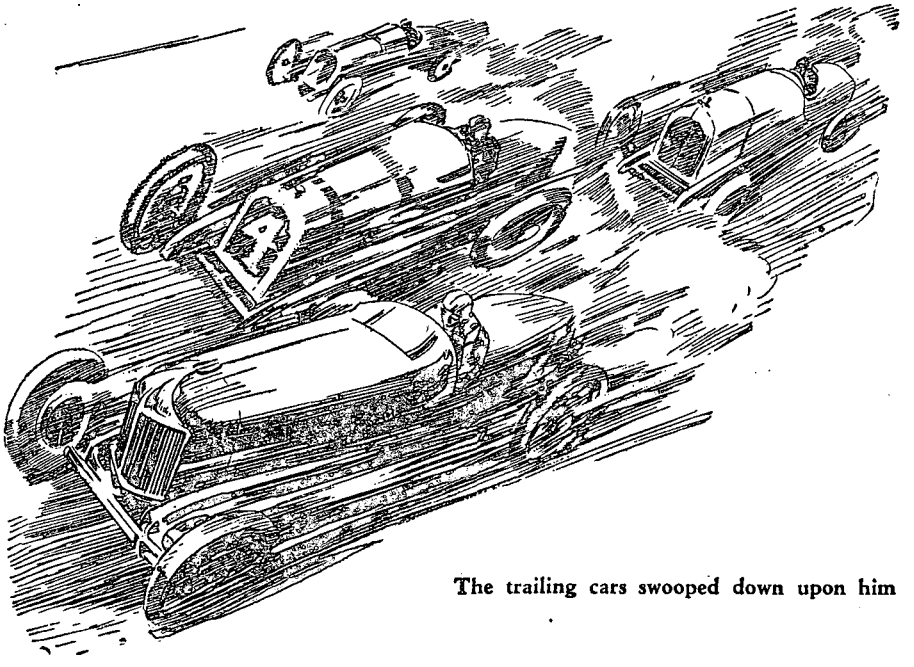
The small man, who had a leathery face, looked Sandy and the car over at length. Even during the brief minutes since their arrival at the track, Ham Collins had had time to tell Sandy that this squat, Napoleonesque person was Jefferson Dale. Dale, better known on the posters as the Outlaw King, was a dirt-eating pilot without peer on any unsanctioned track.

The two partners bore his scrutiny without comment, but not without embarrassment. The Outlaw King took his time. His knife-like gaze did not miss anything, from the boil on Ham Collins's neck to the vulcanized spot on the left rear tire of the bus. He examined Sandy Green's vivid hair, and compared it leisurely with the crimson color of their car.

At last he put a foot on the hub cap of their machine. He rested his chin on his hand, and his elbow on his knee. When he spoke, it was in a murmur that somehow reached their ears in spite of the cataclysmic clamor rising all around them.

"The only advantage you have in this game, kid, is that you ain't likely to live long enough to starve to death," he assured the young driver earnestly.

Sandy Green straightened his long, spare figure, wiped the perspiration



The trailing cars swooped down upon him

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and some of the grease from his face with a sweep of his forearm, and stared boldly at the master of speed on the dirt.

"You can't be so good yourself, if you've got to scare competition away by talking," he said. "If I don't live long, it'll be because I run into your rear end after lapping you."

The brown leather of Jeff Dale's countenance became slightly tinged with boxcar red. A slit that was his mouth widened slightly at both ends. On another face this would have been a smile; on his it was a mere crack in the leather.

"The Hair Raising Kid!" said the outlaw champion. He jerked a stubby thumb back over his shoulder. "Sap Upton, my business manager, handles all my bets. See him. Tell him I said to give you ten to one on everything in your jeans that you won't beat me to-day."

WITHOUT bothering to see if his offer were accepted, King Dale strolled on through his riotous kingdom.

"How much do we bet, Ham?" demanded Sandy Green eagerly. With an impatient gesture, he shoved back the mop of straight red hair that flamed on his head, and his eyes gleamed with blue fire.

"Now wait!" Ham Collins protested. "That stumpy little guy has the crust to think he's the best that ever jammed through the dust. But the hell of it is he ain't far from right. You can bet two bits on your honor an' skill as a race pilot, but we keep the rest for gas an' grub."

Sandy grunted morosely. "I'll roll up a real wad of prize money first, and then I'll call that swelled-up runt for all he's got."

A racing pilot, over his right eye a dent in his skull, swung on his heel and confronted the partners abruptly.

"Name's Talmadge — Spud Talmadge," he said curtly. "King Dale bears down hard on kids at first—he prefers to have old timers like me around, guys who are all gone on the nerve. Don't make any bets. It's time to find out if you've been drawn for this first heat."

He limped rapidly away.

"Well, they aren't all set on scaring me into a chill," Sandy Green said cheerfully. "Will you find out whether I'm due to roll in the first race?"

Ham Collins departed toward the judges' stand. Hardly had he passed through the enclosure used as service pits for the cars when King Dale's squat figure appeared at Sandy's shoulder. Again the eye of the outlaw king dwelt with keen intensity upon Sandy's burning hair. Then it dropped with cold contempt to the crimson speed car.

"Put it this way, then, kid," he said with twisting lips. "We both know you won't beat me. But I'll give you even money that you don't beat one car in your heat with that red drop-stitch sewing machine.—And there'll be eight cars on the track.—Even money!"

"That's taken—for one hundred and seven dollars!" blazed Sandy Green. "Where's this business manager of yours?"

KING DALE raised a long arm above his stocky body. A narrow-headed, apprehensive looking man in a derby hat came up to him at a trot.

"I'm chucking more money into the sink, Sap," King Dale announced. "A hundred and seven—even—that this

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crimson hearse don't beat one car in its heat. How's that for encouraging young talent?"

Sap Upton groaned cavernously, shaking his narrow head. "You'll die in the poorhouse, King," he predicted with sorrow. But his lean fingers gripped a fountain pen and wrote rapidly in a notebook the while.

Ham Collins, returning, quickened his pace.

"Name your own stakeholder," the outlaw champion said.

"Stakeholder for what?" Ham demanded.

Eagerly Sandy Green told him. "It's easy money," he declared.

The old mechanic's face revealed anxiety, distaste and suspicion.

Jeff Dale laughed sardonically at the sight. "Tear it up, Sap," he commanded. "Grandpop, here, is going to tell us the kid isn't of age."

Miserably, Sandy Green gulped. "I guess I did go too far, Ham, in putting up your—" he began.

"Wait!" said Ham Collins. He laid a hand on Sandy's wilting shoulder. "I said we were fifty-fifty partners, didn't I? Whatever you do for us is jake with me, Sandy. Let it stand. We'll ask one of these judges to hold the stakes."

"You won't lose a cent if he blows with every nickel of it," King Dale assured the partners, and idled casually away from them.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE SECOND TURN.

JUST before the first heat, Sandy Green and Ham Collins stood silently beside their car, looking at it. Sandy saw that sturdy machine as the chariot of promise in which he would fulfil brilliant, flashing hopes; Ham saw it as the outcome of days of sweat and agony, of nights of sleepless planning. No miracle of speed, that car, but it was their own.

"The Collins Special!" muttered Sandy Green, with hope in his voice.

The Kane County Fair Grounds dirt track was adequate for horse racing. That was what it had been built for ten years before there was such a thing as an internal combustion engine. But for the peppy, high compression race cars of to-day, the half mile oval was not ideal.

That was what Sandy Green, who was young, but not wholly a fool, was counting on. He knew that despite Ham Collins's creditable job upon the construction of the scarlet machine, there would be faster mills in the meet.

Most of the cars, as Ham had pointed out, were hand-me-downs from the big mile speedways and the brick track at Indianapolis. Some of them could roll at much better than two miles a minute—but not on the curving track. Ham had built this car solely for the rough stuff. It would travel, but it would also stand up.

At Sandy Green's home town, which was Wightsburg, Indiana, the seat of Wight County, there had been a dirt track that was the blood brother of this one. Sandy Green had turned off some fast half miles on that track.

"Forget the bet and drive your race, Sandy," Ham counselled quietly.

"King Dale's the one that isn't going to forget this bet," Sandy assured him. "If I can't beat just one car—"

The hoarse-voiced starter, who wore a white sweater so no driver would take him for a bump on the track, got the cars rolling for the first heat. Sandy was in that heat, and so was King Dale.

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The cars, eight of them in ranks of two abreast, circled the track. The outlaw champ was in the second row; a small, round head projecting a little above the cowl of his somber gray racing machine was all that could be seen of him. The figure of Sandy Green, wearing a brand new helmet, stuck up higher out of his scarlet car, as he rode behind the outlaw champion.

The starter sent them around twice to get the kinks out of the alignment. As he drove by the stand, Sandy turned a beaming and confident face toward the motionless, intent figure of Ham Collins, on the edge of the infield. Ham Collins did not respond; he just looked. This was a big moment for Ham. He was no longer just a greasy-faced mech; he was the constructor of a racing car about to try its worth against other racing cars.

On the next time around, the white-sweatered starter gave them the green flag with a snap. Off! The cars surged ahead. Their accelerating motors burst into the snarling, nerve-tingling song of a speed battle.

IN an instant the vari-colored ranks were broken. The cars leaped in a tangled mass toward the first curve. Only a dirt track driver knows the confusion, the agony, the peril and the strain of that tight, roaring jam at the first corner.

The eight cars hit it in a bunch. Wheels churned and slid in deadly proximity as the cars went slamming around. Out of the mêlée emerged the somber gray speed mill of King Dale. Out of it, too, streaked the scarlet of Sandy Green's mount.

Sandy didn't know much about what happened in the whirling, dust-choked jumble on that turn. But he had the instinct of a fighting pilot. There was as much room ahead as there was to side and back; his heavy foot on the throttle kept him boring through.

Dale, ahead, had two full car lengths on him, but Sandy had no clear lead of the pack as they rocketed into the backstretch. Sandy, with a jerk of his head, exultantly marked his position. Then he focused his gaze sternly on this king of the dirt who had flouted him with word and wager.

"I'll get him, too!" he whispered to his revving motor. "I'll show—"

Sandy didn't succeed on the straightaway. With dismaying ease, the Dale gray car picked up speed on that backstretch.

Sandy was running all out.

The turn into the grandstand stretch was coming up fast. Sandy gripped the jarring wheel, set his grim jaw, and prepared to grab at the last possible instant for his hand brake. He must cut enough from his headlong speed to permit him to slide the car around the looming curve. The best gauge he had of what speed that turn would stand was Dale's fleeing car, ahead of him.

Dale's small, round head turned backward an instant, coolly, disdainfully. Sandy took his hand off the brake handle as if it were red hot. The gray car ahead hit the bank; went slamming around the curve. Its rear wheels were spouting dirt as a fire hose spouts water. Pebbles rattled like buckshot against the white fence around the edge of the track.

Sandy Green's roaring scarlet machine cut into the turn after the gray one. As he moved the wheel with tensed arms, he felt his rear end snap around. Momentum was hurling it straight on.

The machine was almost broadside now. Tires screeched like the fiends

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in hell; and the rear end, still whipping forward, was beyond Sandy's control.

IN another instant Sandy's straining face was pointed directly toward the trailing cars on the backstretch. There seemed to be no chance of escaping them; but his machine had swung through a hundred and eighty degrees, in that terrific skid, and still continued to whirl. He fought the jarring wheel desperately; then the solid dirt beneath him seemed to give away.

A long white thing that Sandy did not recognize as the fence tangled itself up with his car; went with it in splintering flying fragments. Sandy ducked. In the midst of all that blurred, crashing action his hand leaped surely to the ignition switch and cut it.

There was not a great drop from the edge of the track to the ground outside the oval. The Collins Special bounced once on exploding tires before it rolled over. The steering column snapped, and the car rolled again, with Sandy doubled up inside the cowl. It teetered onto its right wheel, and then fell heavily on its side. That was all that happened.

Sandy let go of the steering wheel and crawled out onto the grass. He seemed to be able to move. His lips were bleeding, for he had bitten them.

He stood for a moment beside the car, looking at it. To his eyes, it seemed to be an utter wreck; and in his mind there rose a vision of Ham Collins's stricken face. Then his eyes switched to the snarling, skidding cars that surged on around the track, leaving a whiff of castor oil in their wake. It was then, in the midst of his agony, that Sandy Green became a racing man.

"That runt Dale knows the business!" he muttered thickly. "He took that curve fast on purpose—to lead me on. But he got around, and he got away with it. I'll have to find out how it's done."

Ham Collins rode around on the ambulance. To his credit in heaven, the old mechanic looked over his shame-faced, dust-covered partner before he even glanced at the wreckage of his dream.

"Well, kid, she moved—while she lasted!" he said cheerfully. "How you feeling?"

"Great!" muttered Sandy.

He moved his jaw and tongue, but no other sound came out between his bleeding lips. He wanted to ask Ham if there was any reason why he shouldn't feel great, when he had a partner like Ham Collins; but it just couldn't be done. He thought of the bet, and he thought of the Collins Special.

Ham Collins turned away from him then, and looked over the car.

"You've got the nerve, and we've still got your neck," the old mechanic said hopefully. "Maybe if I can keep the car together long enough, you'll get the experience. Now crawl up on the edge o' the track and watch how the boys hit this curve."

THE last event of that disastrous day was a consolation race for drivers who had not won first or second during the meet. Jefferson Dale, the outlaw king, was not in that one. He left his gray machine to the ministrations of several mechanics, and the collection of his prize money and wager to Sap Upton. Squat, saturnine, calm, he came strolling over to the lonely figure of Sandy Green.

"You working for the American Fence Company or the International Casket?" he asked.

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His eyes, despite his casual air, were shrewdly intent. Sandy Green worked up a grin. It hurt his soul more than his lips. He shoved back from his forehead the flaming red hair that had betrayed his impulsiveness to this keen rival. He kept on smiling.

"I'm not working for anybody; I'm just learning," he said, and looked hard into King Dale's flinty gray eyes. "What I learned to-day is that every kid who comes to the track with something on four wheels has you worried. Otherwise, why would you go out o' your way to grab my cash and lead me into a spill?—Your style o' driving changed right after I went through the fence. You never took another curve the way you took that one."

The leather of King Dale's face cracked in the manner which indicated that he was smiling.

"It's like this, young fellow," he said. "We pilots that earn a living in the dirt have to keep the track clear o' careless young squirts who get their experience driving in baby carriages. It would cost us too much in cars and hospitals if we didn't."

"Well, here's one squirt that's breaking through!" Sandy Green flared. He mopped his lips. "Even a kid has a right to eat. I'm making my grub out o' racing.—And some day I'll trim the wheels off you!"

The outlaw champion answered this with the jerk of his thumb over his shoulder. "Sap Upton, my business manager, handles all my bets," he said in a monotone. "Tell him I said the odds was ten to one that you can't beat me."

Sandy Green with his hands in his empty pockets, was silent. His face was flushed.

"Daring, ain't you?" inquired King Dale softly. "Came through the first jam like a wild man, didn't you? That's the way I like 'em—wild. They go faster—into the barrel."

He moved away at his usual impressive stalk, but he turned his face back over his shoulder.

"The Hair Raising Kid," he said with a flourish, and departed.

CHAPTER III.

OUT TO WIN.

THAT evening, as dusk dropped down on the dusty fair grounds, Sandy Green stood just outside the entrance gate, before a shack that was alleged to be a one-car garage. Silently he watched the racing men depart.

Some of the racing machines, their steering wheels disconnected, were being docilely towed behind old coaches and touring cars. Jefferson Dale's trim little Dorn straight eight, neatly berthed aboard a two-ton motor truck, swept grandly away. King Dale himself drove smoothly past in a comfortable sedan, with the narrow-headed Sap Upton beside him.

One and all, King Dale, Spud Talmadge, Jim Porter, Pete Reilly and the others of the company in which Sandy had moved for a brief three hours, passed the shack inside which rested forlornly on its tireless rims the Collins Special. They were moving on to the next stand, where motors would roar again while men matched nerves and cars matched stamina. But Sandy and Ham and the Collins Special would not be there.

Ham Collins came to the door, wiping his hands on an old rag and glancing absently back over his shoulder into the depths of the garage.

"Just goin' to sort of look her over

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to-night, Sandy," he said. "You can't help me. No use in your sticking around here."

"I'll go to town, then," Sandy Green replied.

There were plenty of garages in town, and most of them were busy in the backwash of fair week. At the first one Sandy Green entered, the proprietor, wearing a gray checked suit of sporting cut, stared hard at him, and harder at his swollen lips.

Sandy Green mustered his painful grin. "I wash 'em a lot better than I drive 'em around curves," he said tentatively. "How about it?"

"Quitting?" asked the garage man.

Sandy turned toward the door. "I'm just beginning," he retorted.

"All right. Begin here," said the proprietor hastily. "There ought to be plenty o' people in town who saw you take the turn, an' who ain't certain yet that you're alive."

DALE and the other pilots who contended without too much success against the outlaw king swung through the Middle West on a fairly well defined but unsanctioned circuit. They raced chiefly at fair grounds, but wherever there was dirt and money they raced.

Ham Collins worked days and nights on the scarlet bus. Sandy Green helped, when he was not earning their living by handling a hose or a chamois at the garage. He also fixed flats, ground valves, and took the squeaks out of cars driven by plump matrons who were thrilled by a glimpse of him. It took three weeks to rebuild and tune up the Collins Special.

At the track at Evansville, the partners caught up with the outlaw gang. King Dale, stonily standing over two sweating mechanics who were chasing down a little roughness in the straight eight, ignored them. Spud Talmadge, that spare wreck of a racing pilot, wished them the luck he had never encountered himself, and Pete Reilly nodded in a friendly way to Ham Collins.

It was not an enthusiastic reception, but Sandy Green observed with keen interest that the outlaw champion, despite his apparent absorption, was aware that they had returned.

"What of it?" Ham Collins asked when Sandy told him. "There ain't anything Dale don't see about this track and the racing crews. What if he does know we're back?"

"Oh, nothing," Sandy answered vaguely. "But I guess even a bug likes to know he's being stepped on, on purpose. That little champ thinks we're worth watching."

The local talent in the home-made cars was numerous in the first elimination heat in which the Collins Special was entered. There was only one other professional job in the race, and Spud Talmadge was at the wheel in that.

Sandy, wheeling as gingerly as a new father at the helm of a baby carriage containing his firstborn, took second place. He finished two hundred yards behind Spud, and ten yards ahead of the nearest local celebrity.

Ham Collins congratulated him rather guardedly.

"Just saving the neck—partnership property," Sandy told him.

In the "big" race for which he had qualified, Sandy uncorked his tabasco only once, and placed fifth—well outside the prize money.

It wasn't until the swing brought them to Rankin that Sandy let his red hair and red car loose. He jammed through a brisk, brief encounter with Jim Porter, and for the first time saw the checkered flag before any other

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driver had it snapped at him. This exploit put him in the final of the day, a ten-mile event modestly known as the "Great Middle West and Southern Sweepstakes." There was five hundred dollars waiting for the winner, and King Dale, Spud Talmadge, Jim Porter, and Pete Reilly had their fingers hooked to pick it up.

King Dale pushed the perfectly groomed gray Dorn speedster around the track, to take first in his heat from Pete Reilly without obvious effort. After this exploit, he wandered over to the Green-Collins team and their scarlet car.

"That bus will earn you money yet," he assured Ham Collins, as the old mechanic crawled out from under after a final inspection. "There's only one thing wrong with it."

"What's that, Jeff?" the gratified mechanic asked humbly.

King Dale took his time. He looked with polite interest at the newest boil on Ham Collins's neck.

"It hasn't got any taxicab body on it," he said, and moved away.

SANDY GREEN went out to win. Ten miles—twenty laps—separated him from enough cash to pull the partnership out of debt and set it on easy street until Labor Day. On that holiday the outlaw drivers would reach Sandy's home town track at Wightsburg; and there, if grim determination ever got a young man anywhere, Sandy Green intended to take away from King Dale the Wightsburg Stakes—a cool thousand for twenty miles. If a man couldn't win in his own home town, where could he win?

But before Wightsburg, there was this great Middle West and Southern Sweepstakes — five hundred dollars' worth.

Only seven drivers took the track in that race. But the dust they churned up in the first two laps was like the dust that a Middle West twister lifts high in its whirling course.

Sandy Green, half blind, swabbing his goggles, jammed through the first lap without glory. Four men drew ahead of him. One of these was the gray Dorn straight eight that the diminutive, leather-faced King Dale drove. He was well in the lead.

Sandy, despite his trailing position, had taken those first two turns at a pace that seemed the limit of speed that the banked track would hold. He gained on the cars ahead, in those two grim skidding bouts; but on the stretches, the other cars pulled away from him. The scarlet mill was outclassed. Although it had seemed peppy enough in the tryouts, it lacked the final mile or two of punch and pickup that wins, even on the short straightaway of a half-mile track.

The five hundred dollars that had seemed so near—a mere ten miles away—suddenly receded the breadth of a continent. There were four insurmountable barriers—four faster cars—ahead of Sandy Green.

CHAPTER IV.

A HOT TIRE.

CURVING his long backbone a little more sharply over his wheel, Sandy settled back in his narrow bucket seat. He glued his straining eyes to the dust-dimmed brown track, and drove. He drove not to win, but to hold what he could. He drove full out on the stretches, and he hit every curve hard. On each turn the surge and spurt of his straining car taught him something.

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Nobody passed him. He held fifth with as grim determination as if he held first on the bricks of Indianapolis, with the checkered flag just ahead.

He knew that Ham Collins was watching. He wanted badly to show his partner that he was not as bad a teammate as he had seemed when he wrecked the Collins Special on the first lap of their racing career. Ham would know where the trouble lay.

Slowly, to Sandy Green's concentrated mind, there came the realization that he was pulling up on one of the four insurmountable barriers ahead. On every lap, a shining aluminum car, Jim Porter's mount, was losing a few feet to him. At the end of each skidding, lurching slide into the stretch, the silvery car was close ahead. It was further away at the end of the straightaway, but not much further.

Sandy devoted all that was in him to picking up feet and inches on Porter's speedster. He saw nothing else.

The brown haze thickened above the oval as the race drew swiftly to its end. If he were to get the aluminum car, it must be now. As the next curve leaped toward him, Sandy gripped his wheel in a supreme effort. There was enough loose dirt flung up along the outer edge of the turn to check a wider skid. If he hit the turn faster than ever, full in the middle of the track, he might be able to cut down the bank as they approached the straightaway. Then he could sling his car in ahead of his aluminum enemy. It was worth trying.

Sandy Green tried it. He did not hug the inner rail at the start of the curve.

Then, as he flung his car up the bank he caught sight of an unexpected element in the game. King Dale's gray Dorn, rocketing down the stretch, had slipped in between him and the inner rail. The Collins Special, for all Sandy's driving, had been lapped by the leader.

That was bad; but what was worse was that the diminutive champion pushed his machine in just in time to block Sandy's attempt to pass Jim Porter. And the gray car was dangerously close. Side by side, with skidding wheels, they ploughed through the churning dust of the banked turn.

SUDDENLY the gray car's smooth skid became a skittering plunge toward Sandy Green's machine. It swung almost broadside as it shot at the scarlet speedster.

Instantly, Sandy wrenched at his wheel; his lean powerful forearms literally jerked his car away from the threatened peril. One of his tires failed to stand the terrific strain, and when that right front shoe blew, Sandy Green went charging up the bank with a wheel that had gone crazy in his grasp. With every muscle in his whip-like body, he heaved to get the car under control. He side-swiped the fence, cutting a long gap in its white boards, and by a scant two inches failed to slide over the edge of the track.

The machine, responding abruptly to his frantic efforts, dived back down and flung itself suddenly around in a complete circle in the middle of the track. Bewildered, but tensed in a supreme effort to save his bus, Sandy Green saw a car looming up in the dust of the curve. It was one of the trailing machines, and the driver, pop-eyed, was staring in effortless despair at the rioting scarlet car dead ahead. It was plain that he was frozen to the wheel, utterly unable to guess or anticipate the next movement of Sandy's machine.

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There was only one way to solve that problem, for only a fraction of a second remained before the crash. Sandy's foot came down hard on the throttle, and his car leaped ahead. It shot with renewed speed at the white infield fence, wabbling crazily on one rim, but with both rear shoes spurting dirt.

Rails and posts flew through the air as Sandy's car hit that fence. In another instant, Sandy was fighting to check his speed on the rough ground of the infield, and for a moment it looked as if the car would roll. But Sandy's last convulsive wrench at the wheel saved him from that final catastrophe.

"IT'S all right, Sandy," Ham Collins assured his downcast young partner seven minutes later. "That radiator can be fixed. We've got enough for another spring, and we'll still have two spare wheels."

He thumped his partner reassuringly on the back. "It wasn't your fault that you weren't leading the field. She let you down on the stretches. You took them curves as if they weren't there."

Again he pounded Sandy Green reassuringly on his backbone. His eyes peered with increasing intensity at the scarlet creation of his brain and hand.

"There's nothing for it but two carburetors," he asserted. "It's gas she needs, and she isn't getting it. Give her gas and—"

"Ham, you know this game," Sandy broke in. "Did King Dale fake that sudden slide of his? Did he put something over on me again?"

Blue fire was glinting in Sandy's eyes as he snapped out that question. Ham Collins took note of the fireworks. His answer, a bit slow in coming, was most emphatic.

"Dale's just human like you or me. He wanted to pass you, and maybe he slammed into the turn with a little too much tabasco."

"Maybe." Sandy's tone voiced his skepticism.

"A mistake like that may cost him a race—or his neck—one of these days," Ham Collins prophesied hastily.

"Why did that tire blow?" Sandy demanded. "It was a good shoe, wasn't it?"

"No shoe is good if you heat up the air inside it and get the casing hot enough," the old mech answered. "You'd been bearing down pretty hard on that tire, the way you took the turns. You took 'em as fast as I ever saw turns taken."

"I've got to take the turns fast," Sandy said rather grimly. "This is a swell car, Ham, but you haven't all the stuff and all the time and equipment you need to make it the equal of that Dorn in straightaway speed. Yeah; we've got to figure on taking 'em a bit faster than the field, hot tires or no hot tires."

Whether or not the slide that had been so disastrous to Sandy's car had been intentional, King Dale showed no signs of guilt when the perspiring partners wheeled the machine back to the pits.

King Dale watched them bring in the disabled machine. He examined it in detail.

Then he shook his leather visage and emitted a grating chuckle.

"I've seen 'em go through the outside fence and I've seen 'em go through the infield fence, but you're the only bird that ever got both fences inside one second," he assured Sandy Green. "Even if you ain't working for a fence company, you're the premier fence-buster of the world. But if you'd get

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yourself one o' these heavy army tanks you could do even better."

IT was Ham Collins who answered that thrust. He put a hasty and restraining hand on Sandy's shoulder before he spoke.

"This kid's got you worried," he stated. "Maybe it's some sort of instinct that tells you when you're going to be licked. But anyhow, the way he makes a slow car stand up to the fast ones is enough to give the heeby-jeebies to any guy who coasts along on fine equipment and fine mechanics."

The rising anger in Sandy's face was quenched by Dale's scowl. The young driver studied intently that hard, twisted countenance.

"Do you reckon *you* could get both fences inside one second—and walk away afterward, champ?" Sandy asked suddenly. He laughed and stretched out a long arm, an arm as steady as the arm of a statue. "No jitters, champ. Could you do that after busting a fence?"

"I don't bust fences!" snarled King Dale.

Sandy grinned. He did not contradict the statement.

"Don't worry too much about me coming along," the youthful driver told the veteran. "I'm leaving the dirt to you—on the track and off. Ham and I are heading toward the bricks. As soon as we scrape together a hunk of cash—"

"Sap Upton is still waiting to give you ten dollars for every one," the outlaw king retorted. "He hasn't done any business with you lately. But before you try to win any races, you better see if you can't finish one."

He swung away. Old Ham watched him thoughtfully.

"Dale ain't busted a fence or run into any real competition lately," he said slowly. "These other drivers have sort of quit trying to beat him. They're living on their guarantees from the promoters."

Sandy Green and Ham Collins hung on. They patched up the scarlet speedster, and Ham Collins got hold of another carburetor. It was no coincidence that a fine gold stopwatch, the gift of a great racing driver, vanished from Ham Collins's pocket on the day before the carburetor arrived. Sandy had a job in a garage again, too. For a while, there was nothing in the lives of either partner except work and sleep.

There was not a great deal of the latter. That summer in the Middle West was a hot one, and as Ham Collins remarked, a man might as well work since he couldn't sleep much anyhow.

Sandy grinned wearily. He had black rings around his eyes.

"Sure!" he agreed. "It's swell weather for work!"

CHAPTER V.

"ON ICE!"

THEY had the scarlet Collins Special back on the dirt within a fortnight. The twin carburetors helped. In that hard-bitten galaxy of racing talent, Sandy Green moved up. But still he couldn't beat King Dale. That gray Dorn could get away on a stretch with a celerity that brought helpless words of heartfelt profanity from the lips of Spud Talmadge, Jim Porter, and Pete Reilly.

Occasionally, one or the other of these three would take an unimportant race from the champion, but never more than one in an afternoon. Mostly these three veterans got by, as Ham

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said, on guarantees and second money. And it need hardly be said that they didn't relish overmuch the arrival of a young pilot with a home-made car who could get around a curve alive at as fast a clip, or even faster, than they could.

Only Spud Talmadge was good-natured about it.

"I ought to sock you," the battered darling of hard luck told Sandy after being nosed out of place. "The only reason I don't is that I don't want to get into the King Dale class."

On that circuit King Dale dragged down a respectable wad every week. Some of it was prize money; some was guarantee. Often he and Sap Upton worked an ambitious kid driver for a bet.

"Saving their lives—that's what I'm doing," the squat, leather-faced pilot languidly told Sandy when the red-headed pilot blazed out at him for fleecing youngsters in this way. "I clean 'em out an' send 'em home to mother before they have a chance to kill themselves trying to beat me."

He tapped his chest complacently. His eyes knifed at Sandy as he nodded. "That's what happens to guys that try to beat me.—They die!"

Sandy did not blink. "We've got to be careful about what we eat, Ham," he said. "This king cockroach just about admits he poisons the ones that go out to beat him."

"I wheel 'em into the grave, you. And that's where you're heading!" King Dale blazed. "Put up or shut—"

"Beat it!" commanded Sandy stoutly. "You're too short in the leg to swat. But that don't mean I'm letting you talk me out o' this circuit. More and more, I'm sizing you up. This gas you hand out around here isn't harmless—it's poison gas. You got some of these pilots about gassed into a coma, but all you've got me is sore. —Move!"

King Dale moved, at his usual stroll, but his eyes were venomous.

THERE came a time in that hot month of August when Sandy and Ham were living on what prize money they made on the tracks. They didn't live high, but they lived; and they managed to get a couple of new shoes for the car. This gave them four spares, though some of them weren't fit for use at over twenty miles an hour.

Then, in the last week of August, a short run of bad luck put the partnership on the brink of bankruptcy.

Seven days before the Wightsburg race, they were as flat as a concrete highway.

Having no racing dates that week, they went to Wightsburg; and so did most of the other drivers. And when the racing men reached Wightsburg, they wished they had stayed away. Wightsburg was hot—it had been hot all summer. Now it was rising to a climax of torridity. There was a heat wave all over the country; but Wightsburg, with a hundred and two degrees on three successive days, gained national notoriety.

Sandy had been looking forward to the big day. Now that it was near he was not too happy. Although not hailed by the town as a famous son, he suffered from stage fright. Since he had last jammed around his home town track, he had come to realize that extracting the last quarter mile per hour out of a track was a fine and a rare art. He wanted more time to learn.

Ham Collins also wanted more time to try somehow to make the scarlet

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car the equal of the gray Dorn that was King Dale's meal ticket.

Some day—perhaps during this crucial Wightsburg Stakes—Sandy might try to squeeze by with just a little too much speed on a turn. Sandy had been steadily whittling down the margin of safety he allowed himself. And at last Sandy was beginning to let King Dale's string of victories bother him. He would sit in the stationary car with his hands gripping the wheel and his long body bent tensely, staring ahead as if he saw always before him the fleet Dorn speed bus.

However, Sandy had not much time to brood. It was hot and they were broke. Out of that combination of facts Sandy managed to pick up jobs for himself and Ham Collins at the plant of the County Ice Cream Company.

Bill Naylor, the boss of the plant, was a round, fat man with a florid face which even in winter was apt to be streaming with perspiration. This week he looked like a fresh-fruit strawberry sundae that had been exposed overlong to the ardent heat of Wightsburg's main street. But despite his looks, he was a friend of Sandy Green, and he needed men.

"I have the grub concession at the fair grounds, too," he told Sandy, using two handkerchiefs to bail out his sopping eye sockets. "But about all they'll eat will be ice cream. It's so hot they've even quit drinking beer. We've got to keep this town flooded with ice cream, or our citizens will melt down into grease. It's a patriotic duty—and there's money in it."

Most of the time throughout that sizzling week the crimson speed bus stood deserted in a garage while Sandy and Ham slung ice cream cans. They also made deliveries by truck, up and down the asphalt lake that once had been the hard-surfaced main street of Wightsburg.

Once, Sandy, with a can of maple nut on his shoulder, ran into King Dale and Sap Upton at Page's drug store.

"Bring it in, boy!" the leather-faced champion commanded loudly. "I can eat that much myself.—I hear you think you've got this race on ice, just because this is your home town.—On ice!"

He guffawed loudly and glanced with pointed emphasis at the ice cream truck which was Sandy's present mount.

"On ice is correct," Sandy said grimly. He lowered his can into the gaping hole behind the counter. Suffering citizens drew close to that new source of supply like flies around a spot of jam.

DESPITE the exigencies of the ice cream business, Sandy did manage to get to the track at dawn, on Labor Day. The night had brought no relief to sweltering Indiana, and the sun had risen with baking heat.

Sandy and Ham tinkered with their machine, the crimson paint of which seemed to exude calories like the cherry wire of an electric heater. While they were working, Spud Talmadge blew a tire on the backstretch and rolled over twice. Miraculously, he got out of it with a broken arm and three snapped ribs.

Hardly had the ambulance pulled away from the track before an amateur pilot's right front tire let go. The car was only saved from shooting through the grandstand by a concrete curbing that made hash of it and sent the pilot hurtling up into the seats. The ambulance came back for him, and the surgeon said he might not die.

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"It's the heat," said Ham Collins apprehensively. "There's a limit to what even rubber can take from the sun."

Sandy nodded absently. "If a fellow can't win in his home town, where can he win?" he muttered.

Ham Collins looked at his tall partner with plain misgivings. What little flesh had once covered Sandy's spare figure seemed to have been stripped away by this last week of grilling labor and unending heat.

But Sandy gave Ham no cause for worry by excess speed that morning. He insisted on using only the four worst tires on the car, and he merely jogged around, studying the angle of the banks and spotting the worst bumps in the track.

During Sandy's practice laps, Ham Collins was called away by the superheated Bill Naylor to assist at getting supplies of ice cream to Naylor's booths throughout the fair grounds. Shortly thereafter Sandy joined him, until the time of the meet, the racing partners became mere truck drivers.

King Dale, strolling even more languidly than usual through the grounds, advised them both to stick to the trucks.

"It's just as you said," Sandy told him, examining the champion driver with great care. "I've got this race on ice."

King Dale waggled his thumb in his customary gesture. "Sap Upton's around somewhere," he stated in grim mockery. "It's still ten to one.—No objection to cash earned as a soda jerker or ice cream wrestler."

It may have been hot at dawn, but it was terrific by noon. And at two it was enough to parch a cactus anywhere in the fair grounds. Only the fact that it was as cool there as elsewhere, and that there was more ice cream at the fair, brought the crowd to the grounds.

King Dale won his heat. By pushing his powerful car at the flag he got out in front, clear of the dust. Then he drove with more than his usual skill, looking backward and keeping his bus traveling only about thirty feet ahead of his nearest rival. When Pete Reilly, the driver behind, popped a tire, King Dale promptly throttled down. It wasn't very thrilling for the crowd, but Dale was taking no chances on that super-heated track.

Ham Collins met his partner with a face of tragedy when they got together before the time for the third elimination heat. It was in this event that Sandy must take first or second place, in order to qualify for the thousand-dollar Wightsburg Stakes.

"Somebody's pinched our four good shoes!" Ham announced in a stricken voice.

"What?"

"I had 'em under a tarpaulin—but when I went to put 'em on the bus they were gone. I've looked at every wheel in the infield. They're not here!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE GREEN FLAG.

SANDY rubbed his head.

"Well, the old ones will qualify me for the race, anyhow," Sandy said soberly. "I only have to jam around faster than four old wrecks in my heat. The speed mills were all drawn for the other heats."

Ham Collins was not to be appeased. He roved among the other contestants like a wild man.

King Dale got off a number of bright remarks at his expense. "Now if you c'n only pay somebody to swipe

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the car, too, you'll be all set to make a fortune in the ice business," he assured the distracted mechanic. "Stick to what you're fit for!"

Ham Collins turned away from the outlaw dirt champion, for he had caught sight of the squat, round body of Bill Naylor, the ice cream man. He was on the front seat of a truck that was bumping over the infield, toward the pits.

But King Dale was not through with Ham. The champ stalked along beside the mechanic to where the truck was drawing up beside Sandy and the crimson Collins Special.

Bill Naylor, streaming wet, crawled off the seat of his truck. Painfully, he gasped a few mouthfuls of the burning air, and drew out his overstuffed wallet.

"I'm making it a hundred that I owe you two boys," he said to Sandy and Ham. "Extra pay for extra heat."

King Dale eyed the ten limp green bills with covetous interest.

"Just think how easily you could turn that measly hundred into a golden thousand," he said temptingly to the partners. "Sap Upton—"

"Call him over!" Sandy Green said suddenly.

"Wait!" Ham Collins implored. He glanced from his partner to the worn tires on his cherished crimson car.

"Ham, you've got to believe in me this time!" Sandy declared.

With a gratified smile, King Dale was already waving to his business manager.

"I want to make a bet, Ham," said Sandy, earnestly. "Won't you let me back myself in my own home town?"

Ham hesitated, but he could not resist the appeal in his youthful partner's face. "Go to it!" he said, and tried hard to put encouragement into his voice. "You heard my partner, Dale. We're shooting the hundred!"

King Dale tapped Sap Upton on the chest and started away. "Give 'em a receipt for it now, Sap," he said. "That's all they'll get out of it, so make it look nice. The Hair Raising Kid will want to frame it for his ice cream parlor."

TEN minutes later, Sap Upton dashed madly out on the track toward King Dale's gray machine. The Dorn, its small master in the bucket seat, was drawn up in the first row of cars, awaiting the word of the starter to get away.

Over the cars hung a blue haze of castor oil smoke. It was as if the baking dirt of the track was at last about to burst into blue flame under the fierce impact of the sun's lance-like rays. But Sap was not concerned with weather. His narrow jaw was sagging and he swallowed twice before he was able to speak. With a quivering hand he gestured toward the crimson Collins Special, which was just being rolled out onto the track.

"Say! Listen! They've gypped us!" he gasped. "Just after I handed over our thousand to this bird Naylor as stake holder, Sandy got Ham Collins to give him a hand at unloading four wheels out of that ice cream truck. They was the same four wheels that Ham had been bleating was stolen.—

"'It was me that pinched those tires, Ham,' Sandy says. 'They've been in Bill Naylor's coldest ice box. They're ice cold, and they'll not blow while I romp through this twenty miles!'"

Upon the agitated business manager King Dale bestowed a venomous snarl.

"You blasted fool!" he raved. "Why didn't you tip me off sooner? A mech could have fixed a slow leak—"

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He stretched back to lay a hand upon the burning tread of one of his own tires; then jerked it away. His customary nonchalance was gone; he cursed until the wilted Sap slunk away.

The starter, brisk, inexorable, waved the cars into motion. Still cursing, King Dale got his car rolling. As he gathered way, he looked around and found himself staring into the grinning, determined face of Sandy Green.

The cars swept around, with the heat striking up at them as if they were traveling the sands of a desert. The red-faced starter, watching the alignment closely, flicked his red starting flag at them, and they roared into action.

Something red and hot came crawling up behind the gray Dorn, on the outside. It was red-headed Sandy Green, driving all out, and challenging for the lead on the first turn. Just as he had challenged once before.

King Dale stepped a little harder on his throttle. The two cars, wheel and wheel at the head of the bunch, jammed into the turn.

They were still wheel and wheel as, sliding, they hit the backstretch. King Dale's teeth were set. A swift side glance showed him that the grin on Sandy Green's lean countenance was still there. And Sandy Green's foot was kicking the crimson Collins along that short straightaway at all that the car had in her.

The Dorn picked up, too. But King Dale, thundering past the spot where Spud Talmadge had turned over that morning when the hot tire blew, slid a hand toward his brake.

The curving, banked, baking turn loomed ahead of him like the sizzling gateway of perdition. King Dale was too much of a racing man, he told himself, to go rocketing into hell trying to catch a tricky, crazy kid with ice cold tires on his car. And so he cut his speed a trifle.

Sandy Green, surging on, promptly flicked his red car toward the infield rail and slipped in ahead of King Dale. For the first time in his life, he was leading the outlaw champion. Though there was a broad grin on his face, it was an absent-minded grin—a grin that had been left over—as the next few yards of curving dirt rolled under his wheels. All he had of nerve and strength was occupied in fighting his wheel.

THE car's skid was a stiff one; far worse than the perfunctory slide of rear wheels taking a curve too fast. His lean arms worked like pistons, taming the turn. But he won his fight, and came around onto the grandstand stretch with motor snarling.

Straightening out, he looked swiftly behind. Out of the cloud of dust that his churning tires had flung skyward, the gray car of King Dale was emerging. There was a gap—a short gap between the Collins Special and King Dale's gray Dorn.

Sandy kept his car humming, but when he took the next turn he took it with no such hurtling momentum as before. He took it as King Dale was accustomed to taking turns—just fast enough.

Two laps later, King Dale, blaring past the grandstand a hundred yards behind the crimson Collins, became aware that Sap Upton on the edge of the track, was jumping up and down. His business manager's mouth was open, and he was gesturing wildly toward Sandy's car. He seemed to be urging King Dale to beat the other machine, and as he hurtled past, King

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Dale spared a moment to launch a furious epithet at his business manager.

"You pin-headed fool!" he raged, and flashed his yellow teeth in a snarl as he thundered past.

With squinting eyes, King Dale jammed on around the burning, dust-shrouded track. Not without nerve had the dirt champion won his title in the hard-bitten crowd. It was just that this kid, flying along on iced tires—iced tires, mind you!—had an advantage that was maddening and disheartening. And that half wit, Upton, stood there waggling his arms at the edge of the track!

King Dale ground his teeth, and the hot dust swirled into his parched throat. On, he drove, cursing.

Ahead of him, Sandy Green, still grinning, pushed the Collins Special to her utmost. He was taking the turns a bit harder than King Dale. The gray car was still faster on the straightaways than the crimson; it was on the curves that Dale spared his tires.

As the cars circled and slid on and on through that small hell of heat fumes and dust, Ham Collins, motionless, watched from the sidelines. He was seeing a machine of his own creation sweep on to probable victory.

Ham's immobility was in striking contrast with Sap Upton. Sap, his long arms writhing frantically, waved the dirt champion on. Two mechanics had now reinforced Sap in thus urging Dale to greater speed, and Dale, as he roared past, managed to shake a quivering, clenched fist at his wild-eyed supporters. It was a feeble effort to express his real feelings toward the three exhorters, and his car lunged suddenly across the straightaway before he could get his hand back on the wheel. Purple-faced, he jerked the machine into line again and shot on.

Through the hot red dust Sandy Green bored on. He was whittling—whittling steadily away at the tiny margin of safety there was left on those sharp, pitiless corners ahead of him. The slightest mishap or mischance would send him hurtling like a meteor off that narrow, baking dirt beneath him. But he was now driving with cool, calculating daring, rather than with impulsive, brainless recklessness. He must take these chances to win. His head—not the red hair above it—was in command of the Collins Special.

What speed the car could not give him in acceleration he grimly retained on those shimmering curves. And out of the haze of floating dirt ahead a cool green flag flicked suddenly in front of Sandy Green's eyes.

"Last lap!" he gasped; and turning his head, instantly he saw that Dale's gray Dorn was pressing him harder in a final effort to win. There were still two curves to go, and the Collins must storm around them far faster than the Dorn.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HOME STRETCH.

SANDY went jamming into the dust of the first curve with the knowledge that somewhere before him there were two cars hidden in the red fog. He was about to lap them. And since King Dale was closing up behind, there was only one thing he could do.—Sandy kept his right foot down. Squinting through the thick air, he flung the crimson car around.

Suddenly pebbles rattled on his goggles. He caught sight of a blue blur dead ahead. It was a car piloted by an amateur, and it was weaving uncertainly round the rough curve.

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Sandy wrenched at his wheel as his left front tire leaped at the rear end of the blue machine. His car lurched up on its right wheels and seemed to hang there; then it dropped onto its tires again.

Something lashed at him, and he ducked. The thing went hurtling past his ear, and as his machine hummed past the blue car he understood. His eyes fastened on his whirring left front tire. It was now white, not black.

"Sunk!" he groaned.

The thing that had almost hit him had been the tread of that tire. His sudden slide had stripped the rubber off the fabric carcass of the shoe; and he was riding on the bare canvas plies.

Sandy kept on wheeling, however. Taking his eyes off the thin, inadequate cotton cloth separating him from a blowout, he drove—and passed another car.

He roared down the backstretch as fast as he had traveled in the first lap. King Dale spurted after him. The dirt champion had spotted that flying tread as it shot high into the air, and he believed he now had his enemy in a hole.

"Here's where my neck goes—into the deal, Ham!" Sandy breathed.

Grimly, Sandy snapped his head around to see how hard he would have to hit that final turn. King Dale was closing up inexorably, his own hot tires forgotten because of the knowledge of his advantage. For Sandy it was quit or crash.

He braked steadily, and his car slowed a little. Then it was on the bank.

To attempt to jam around broadside, close to the infield fence, would have meant both suicide and defeat. And so Sandy held his car high on the bank, where the turn was not quite so sharp. At any minute that tire . . .

Dale's gray machine was cutting down the bank. The small driver was bent upon knifing in between the inner fence and the crimson speed mill. Once he was on even terms with Sandy, it would be all over; for of the two the gray Dorn was the faster car.

Sandy came roaring out into the final straightaway. He was still leading on the home stretch, and the finish by the yelling grandstand was looming ahead. King Dale was out on the stretch, too. His gray machine, its motor screaming, cut yard after yard off Sandy's lead. The starter, crouching watchfully at the edge of the finish line with his checkered flag, was very close now . . .

ALL at once Sandy's treadless tire hit a high spot on the hard-baked dirt, and it blew like a penny balloon. His crimson machine leaped in the air as if it had hit dynamite, landed hard.

The airless tire touched the grit first, and seemed to hook in. The car, bounding again, pivoted dizzily around in the air on that bare rim. Rear end foremost, it struck the track once more, on all four wheels, lurching drunkenly.

King Dale, close behind that uncontrolled ton of steel, braked mightily. His hands closed vise-like on his wheel to dodge. He was tense as a coiled spring. Before the next second was over he would save his life or lose it.

Another tire on the crimson Collins blew—a front tire. The machine was shooting backward, thrust on by the mighty and relentless power of momentum. Regardless of the drive of its spurting wheels, it brushed the infield fence. Sandy, head snapping around, cut his switch and spun the wheel in time to save the lives of the crowd solid against the inner fence. Then the car veered drunkenly out onto

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the track again, still churning—backward!

Again King Dale braked and swerved with screeching tires.

Sandy was still fighting. Dogged, hopeless, he fought to the end. Suddenly he jerked the car out of gear. His motor was dead, and the Collins rolled backward in a veering, drunken course toward the finish line. With the last of its dying momentum, it wavered toward the starter, hampered by its bare rims. The line was only a few feet away.

King Dale's wheels were locked and sliding; his car was broadside on the track. With a bitter curse he released his brake; jammed his foot down on the throttle. The car moved again; then bucked convulsively. It was choking over that sudden overwhelming dose of gas shot into it by Dale's flattening of the accelerator pedal. It moved no faster than the Collins, crawling backward down the track.

Then suddenly spark plug after plug fired, and the Dorn lunged ahead. Dale hummed over the line.

But the starter had already tapped the crimson tail of the Collins Special, as it backed across the wire.

NINETY seconds later King Dale, having completed an unwilling lap, leaped out of his bucket seat like a slug out of a shotgun. Vengefully, he twirled a hard, round fist in front of Sandy Green's happy face.

"You double-crossing crook!" he raved.

"Backward!" murmured Sandy blissfully. "Backward!—We beat you driving backward!"

"You beat me by a dirty trick—keeping your tires cold!" the dirt champion charged. "I'm calling you a coward, as well as a crook!"

"But—that's what I been trying to tell you!" Sap Upton put in plaintively.

King Dale spun around and confronted his agitated business manager. "And you—blast you—and you! Waving at me like a bunch of nuts!"

"They weren't iced—them tires!" Sap Upton explained with injured dignity. "That's what I was tryin' to tell you!—I got it off that fat ice cream man that's holding our thousand. 'They ain't iced,' he says. 'Sandy just asked me to drive up here with 'em in the truck for the psycho.—You know. For a bluff!"

Sap Upton gulped with emotion. "Sandy rode this race on tires as hot as yours.—And two of 'em blew out, didn't they? That's what I was tryin' to tell you—they weren't iced at all!"

"You're fired!" King Dale spat at him. "Fired! See!—And those—"

He looked around for his mechanics, but the two wise men had ducked.

"Well, it never was much of a job," Sap Upton answered. "An' now that you've been trimmed by a kid—"

"I'm thanking you for the idea, King," Sandy put in earnestly. "That bum crack about me having the race on ice—it helped just when I needed help worst. And if Ham will forgive me for not letting him in on it, him not being a good actor—"

"Forgive you!" exclaimed the jubilant old mech. "Listen, Sandy! I got an idea for rebuilding the Collins Special. With our wad of cash we'll put it so far ahead of that Dorn that—"

"Ham," Sandy said, "you don't have to make it faster than the Dorn. Just make it *about* as fast. I think I've got a dirt championship—on ice."

THE END.

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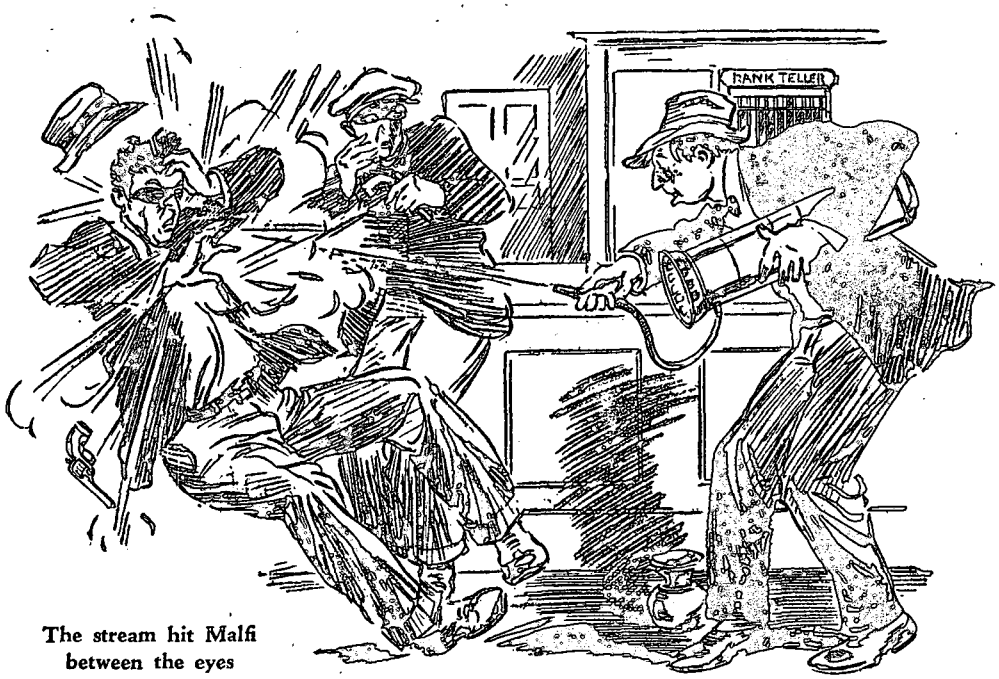

The stream hit Malfi between the eyes

Wilder Every Hour

By TIP BLISS

The West wasn't wild enough to suit Long Tom Logan, the Tuscaloosa Terror—so a few bandits and Comanches helped him out

EVERYTHING was going along with the temperature about normal in the town that called itself Little Prairie Flower when Long Tom Logan swung off the 11.37 westbound local in his ten-gallon hat, leather chaps with trailing fringes, blue-and-white checked shirt, red bandanna handkerchief knotted loosely around his neck, high-heeled boots, and the rest of the paraphernalia.

To indicate normality in Little Prairie Flower, the following isolated examples should suffice. The Twentieth Century Far Western Literary Ladies' League was holding its weekly debate on the subject: "Resolved, that Shaw is a better playwright than Ibsen." (Nothing came of that eventually to dampen the spirits of either gentleman.) In his booth on the railroad station platform, Comanche Ike Bloodynose, whose far-away ancestors had been Indian chiefs and red hellions as ever was, was shining the shoes of Congressman Wes Schultz, who was trying to decide whether it would be more impressive to start off his forthcoming address in Washington with "My friends and countrymen" or "My fellow countrymen and friends."

Perched on his high stool at the

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Little Prairie Flower State Bank, Henry Dobbs was looking at a lot of meaningless figures in red ink and wishing that Miss Orrelle Tracy would marry him, which she wouldn't, and that he had some funds to get married upon, which he hadn't. A dozen feet away, Miss Tracy sat at a typewriter desk, wishing it was time for lunch, and with the same vague, impersonal affection in her mind for Henry Dobbs that she entertained for the man in the moon or the latest movie hero.

In short, the only thing out of kilter at Little Prairie Flower that day was that at the edge of the desert Joe Salvetto, escaped convict, second-degree murderer and general desperado, was conferring with his lieutenant and followers on the final plans for holding up the Little Prairie Flower State Bank.

"Now, r e m e m b e r," Joe told "Stinger" Malfi and his associates. "I don't want no shootin' unless they's no help for it. This here town is a sort of a Sunday school outfit, and I hear the bulls get very tough indeed with guys which shoot other guys. Besides, blood is slippery and you're li'ble to fall down and get it smeared all over you. They prob'ly ain't got a gat in the joint and wouldn't know which end of it a bullet came out of if they had, so they ain't no reason why we shouldn't be gentlemen about this. If anybody puts up a holler, bean 'em over the ear nice and polite with a gun butt an' knock 'em down. But no shootin'."

"Unless we got to," interpolated Stinger Malfi, who had been born on the Fourth of July and liked to hear things go bang.

"Yeah, of course," Joe agreed. "Unless you got to. What I mean is, don't got to unless you got to. Well, finish up your chow an' then let's get goin'. It's Friday, and Friday is a good day for bank holdups. They ain't nobody been around yet to get their payrolls out."

"If I was runnin' this mob," put in a long, gloomy looking individual with lank black hair, who resembled one of the more unpleasant Pilgrim Fathers and was known among his cronies as Hearse-face, "I wouldn't start nothin' on a Friday. No good ever come out of anything that started on a Friday."

"You ain't runnin' this mob," Joe pointed out. "And as for Fridays—well, I was born on a Friday."

"That's just it," Hearse-face said.

IT was just about this time that Long Tom Logan descended from the train and got his first eyeful of Little Prairie Flower.

To be frank about it Little Prairie Flower wasn't much of an eyeful. Main Street was nothing more than a dusty river, flanked on both sides by dismal one- and two-story buildings, which housed such exciting industries as gas and oil, hot dogs and hamburgers, hay, feed and oats, the La Belle Marie Olde Dresse Shoppe, Milliken's Drug Store and the like. The bank stood on the corner of Maple Street, so called because some early settler had dimly recalled once having seen a maple tree there.

Long Tom Logan sighed audibly, although he had expected nothing better. As advance man of the Bar-D Ranch, Williams's Wild West and Foxboro's Untamed Redskins United Shows, he had been through a thousand such towns as Little Prairie Flower. Being an optimist at heart, he always hoped for a change, but never got it. As he put one foot to the platform he asked the conductor:

"Brother, what's the best hotel in this burg?"

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"There ain't any," replied the official. "The Grand Imperial's the only one, but it ain't the best. If there was another, the Grand Imperial would be the worst."

"Yeah, I know," Long Tom sighed. "You didn't have to go any further than call it the Grand Imperial. That tells the story. Here's a bunch of tickets to the Bar-D—greatest show on earth. Give 'em to your friends."

"If I did," the conductor said, "I wouldn't have any friends. But much obliged. I know a lot of people I don't like, but ain't got even with yet. And you didn't have to go any further than call it the greatest show on earth to put me wise. I suppose you got all the ex-bartenders of the Gay Nineties doing Oriental hooch dances. Well, so long. If you eat at the Grand Imperial, I hope you don't catch anything worse than a bad epidemic."

He was the sort of bird whose favorite occupation would have been identifying unknown corpses.

But Tom had his work to do, and he felt that the busier he was the less opportunity he would have to realize where he was. The first thing to do was to get Little Prairie Flower into the proper frame of mind to receive the Bar-D show, to make it Wild West conscious.

He adopted a rolling gait, which he had picked up from descriptions in magazines and perfected during his spare time, and swaggered to the middle of the platform. His clothes, he knew would bear scrutiny, for they had come from a Chicago mail-order house which was a recognized expert in such matters.

"Yip-pee!" he shouted. "I'm a she-wolf from old Arkansas, and it's my night to howl! Yip-pee! I'm hard to curry above the knees!"

Comanche Ike Bloodynose, who had just put a final luster on Congressman Wes Schultz's patent leathers, laid aside his brush and eyed Long Tom disapprovingly.

"Where they get it, I am sure I cannot ascertain," he remarked in the clipped, precise English he had learned in the government school. "This man is clearly intoxicated, and is evidently just returning from a fancy dress ball at close upon noon. He must have debarked from the train at the wrong depot."

THE Congressman chewed on his gold toothpick, and wasn't so certain. Long Tom was a stranger to him, and Long Tom didn't look drunk. Moreover, Schultz was an astute legislator. He wanted to get through a special Indian appropriation—there were seven Indians in his district, even including Mama Sulphur, who was expected to die at any moment—and he had an inkling of an idea that the visitation of this gaudy apparition might assist in his oratory. If he could get a snapshot of him and pass it around among other members whose votes were doubtful, it would add local color and that sort of thing.

"He should probably be arrested," suggested Comanche Ike. "I'll inform Constable Tonker."

"Now, wait a while, Ike," said Mr. Schultz. "This bird may be a bit nutty, but if you go pinching everybody that's nutty there's going to be something like a hundred and twenty million Americans behind the bars before morning, and I and you are going to have one tough time running this nation all by ourselves." The Congressman was perfectly capable of speaking good English, but he saved it for those months when he was being paid for it.

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"Besides, Tonker ain't arrested anybody this year, and he's out for a clean record. Let's talk to him. And be nice to him—maybe he's a registered voter."

He beckoned, and Long Tom teetered over, wishing the mail-order house hadn't been so literal in following the regulations as to the type of heels cowboys were supposed to wear. He slapped Comanche Ike heartily on the back.

"Hello, Big Chief," he grunted. "Ever want to get out on heap big war path again? Feel like-um want to see tomahawk plenty red with paleface gore some?"

"Not particularly," Ike replied, heedful of Mr. Schultz's admonition to be polite, for the Congressman was a good customer and had his shoes shined every day. "When I was chief clerk and floor walker of Sam Swart's Second hand Clothing & Sporting Goods Emporium, I saw all the war I cared to for a considerable period. It was, in fact, over a disagreement with Mr. Swart as to the ultimate bargain price of a rather dilapidated tennis racket that I became severed from my job."

Tom instantly dropped his professional attitude.

"Sorry, pal," he apologized. "A little misunderstanding on both sides, I guess. But as a matter of fact, I'm representing the Bar-D show that's playing here next Thursday—greatest show on earth, if I do say so myself. Listen, let's get together. I'm a man of few words. You're an Indian. I've got to work this burg around to the right point of view. Couldn't you go wild—just a little wild, say—for four nice free tickets down in the front row?"

Comanche Ike shook his head decidedly. "No, sir, thanking you very much. I am a college graduate, a family man, a government ward—"

"I've got two dollars in cash that could be spared, too," Tom murmured, as if talking to himself.

COMANCHE IKE hesitated and scratched his chin dubiously. There was no gainsaying that times were tough, and there was likewise no gainsaying that two dollars was two dollars, no matter how you counted them. He glanced at the Congressman, and that dignitary nodded almost imperceptibly.

"Well," Ike said finally. "It's against all my principles, but possibly I could go a little bit—just a little, little bit—wild for two dollars."

"Tell you what I'll do," Tom offered generously. "You go all wild, sort of berserk if you know what I mean, and I'll make it half a sawbuck. Five berries. Think of what you could do with five berries—"

"Why," cried Ike, "I could pay up my back water taxes and my first installment of a semi-morocco bound set of 'Lives of the Martyrs.' I'll tell you what I'll do, Mr.—ah—"

"Long Tom Logan, the Tuscaloosa Terror."

"Mr. Logan. For ten dollars, I'll pick up any man you select, go utterly aboriginal, tie him to a stake, scalp him—"

"No, no!" Tom cried hastily. "No matter about that. No scalping, please. People are getting fussy about that. Editorials in the papers, 'The Growing Scalping Menace,' and all that. Anyway, I can't afford more than five dollars. Here—here's the money and the tickets. Good Thursday, either afternoon or evening performance. And here's two bits extra for war paint. Just streak some of it on your face, and go a little bit—ah—native. You probably will know how better than I."

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He looked somewhat hesitantly at Mr. Schultz, who had the gift of appearing imposing, even when he wasn't trying to be so. Now that he was trying, he looked like a composite photograph of all the statues in the Hall of Fame.

"I hope, sir," Tom said a bit shamefacedly, "that you will overlook this trifling byplay and horseplay. All in the spirit of good clean fun, you know. Healthy animal spirits. Boys will be boys, and when the circus comes to town—"

"Not at all," Mr. Schultz said. He leaned forward, for he was still sitting in the shoe-shine chair, and whispered to Tom guardedly: "I, sir, am Congressman from this district."

"Oomps! Very sorry. Shouldn't have mentioned circuses."

"As a matter of fact, young man," continued Mr. Schultz, who made it a point of never listening to anybody else when he was talking himself, "while I regard all exhibitions of the type you are engineering as fit only for childish and moronic minds, I do not mind admitting that your program fits into my purposes very well. I am at present straining every endeavor to convince my honorable, intelligent and high-minded associates of the necessity and inevitability of— By the way, do you vote in my district?"

"No, sir."

"Oh, all right. Then what I'm trying to do is to yank a certain Indian measure through the thick skulls of that gang of mummies in Washington. It isn't such a bad bill, as they go, and it's just swimming in gravy. But the point is that the Wild Wester I can get this town to look—I mean the Wester Wild—ah, no matter—the point is, I don't suppose you mind having a couple of pictures taken—say of yourself, in your present costume, of Comanche Ike, and of any other quaint local celebrities I might manage to dig up—"

Tom minded that just like he'd have objected to being given the only existent set of keys to the United States Mint, and said so.

"That's fine, then," Mr. Schultz said. "No time like the present. You've given me notions, my boy. Watch my smoke."

HIS smoke vanished in a pillar of dust into the one-floor-up studio of Marlborough Bagg, leading and sole photographer of Little Prairie Flower, from which he almost immediately emerged, trailed closely by Mr. Bagg and all his professional accoutrement. It was Mr. Bagg's first stroke of business for the year, barring a family group of Mama Sulphur's forty-one grandchildren, for which he hadn't been paid.

"Where are you going to pose?" Mr. Bagg asked.

"I am not going to pose," Wes Schultz said. "This picture is going to be about other people."

Mr. Bagg almost fainted for the first time in his healthy, red-blooded life. All previous photos desired by the Congressman had been of the Congressman. "Overwork must have gone to his head," thought Mr. Bagg. But he followed on, lugging his steamer-trunk camera.

Mr. Schultz led the way up the stairs of Odd Fellows' Hall to where the Twentieth Century Far Western Literary Ladies' League was just breaking up its meeting. Mr. Schultz leaped on the stage and held up a domineering hand—the hand that was accustomed to sway the votes of often two and sometimes three members of the House of Representatives.

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"Ladies!" he thundered. "Ladies! One moment, please."

The ladies hesitated, for it was time to go home to prepare lunches for a crew of angry husbands whose only idea of Shaw was that it was a mild expletive and thought Ibsen was the man who had sunk the Merrimac somewhere around Cuba in the Spanish American War.

"Ladies!" bellowed the Honorable Schultz. "Have you perchance forgotten what day this is?"

The ladies had not forgotten, because they had never known. Neither did the Honorable Schultz know, but he was equal to the emergency. He fumbled in his pocket and drew forth an unreceipted bill from Dave Histotter, seven dollars and twenty-five cents, cleaning and pressing. Fortunately, it was made out on yellow paper.

"This, ladies, is a telegram from none other than the *President of the United States!* To wit—but I shall omit the technical phraseology. What the President is driving at," continued Wes Schultz colloquially, "is that this is Old Pioneers' Day in all this vicinity. He particularly wants Little Prairie Flower to make a big splash on this day. He wants the ladies to dress up immediately—this is dated from Washington about fifteen minutes ago and has just come into my hands—in some old homespun pioneer clothes, if you know what I mean, and form a parade. Photographs will be taken, and everything."

A buzz of excited chatter followed his words. Wes Schultz stepped down from the platform. He knew when he had said enough, and besides, he couldn't think of anything more to say. But, as he passed out of the room, the scattered bits of conversation that he overheard more than gratified him.

"My dear, that old pannier that my great aunt—" "A genuine calico gown, Mrs. Emmett. I'm sure it's up in the attic—" "Clarice, just the other day when I was cleaning out, I ran across the quaintest piece of old gingham—"

"*Hurry!*" shouted the Honorable Wes, as he departed. "Parade starts in fifteen minutes. *The eyes of the President are upon you!*"

MEANWHILE what of Long Tom Logan?

Long Tom realized that his luck was with him and that he had started something. Being a good showman himself, he recognized another good showman when he saw one and he knew that he and the Congressman were just two babes in the wood snuggled up under the same leaf.

He walked up Main Street in the direction of a weatherbeaten sign proclaiming that Good Eats and Soft Drinks were for sale within, and entered.

There were only two occupants of the place, a somnolent counterman and a lugubrious youth perched on a stool regarding an egg sandwich and apparently on the point of bursting into tears. Long Tom took one glance at the sandwich and decided it was enough to make anybody cry. To the counterman he said:

"I want raw meat, pardner."

"Huh?" asked the counterman.

"Raw meat, pardner. A man's dish. Red an' drippin' with blood. Wild West food for a Wild West hombre. It's my night to howl. Yip-pee!"

"All right," said the counterman. "How do you want it cooked?"

"Raw, pardner, raw!"

"I guess," said the counterman to the sad youth, "he means he wants hamburger not too well done." He dis-

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appeared into a mysterious cave in the rear.

"Raw, red meat," Long Tom confided to the sad youth, "was good enough for my grandfather, ole Dan'l Boone, and it's good enough for me."

The sad youth raised his eyes from contemplation of the sandwich.

"I have more troubles," he said, "than worrying about meat, raw or cooked."

"I know," Tom agreed sympathetically. "I guess I first began to notice that egg half a block down the street. You wouldn't think a hen gettin' along in years as far as that egg's mother must of got *could* lay an egg. But you never can tell about women."

"You're darned right about that, mister," the sad youth said. "You can't tell about 'em. Look at me! *Look* at me! A woman ruined my life forever, mister. Ten minutes ago she refused to marry me for about the twenty-eighth time. I'm getting disgusted with it. I've about decided to end it all. I told her so. I told her I'd jump off a high building. What do you think she said? She said to go ahead, because there wasn't a building in Little Prairie Flower high enough to do more than sprain your ankle on.

"You know what I said? I said, 'Is that so?'"

"That was a pretty snappy comeback," Long Tom approved. "But you hadn't ought to buckle in to her. Why, when my grandfather, Kit Carson, was courtin'—"

"You said your grandfather was Daniel Boone," said the sad youth.

"He was my other grandfather," said Long Tom. "A guy's got to have two grandfathers, hasn't he? Well, when he was courtin'—ah—Martha Washington or somebody and she wouldn't have him, he just hauled out his old six-shooter and put it up against her temple and said, 'Shut up, you dog, and lead me to the preacher.' They raised *men* in those days, pardner. *Men who always got their women!*"

THE sad youth stared hard at Long Tom. Gradually, some of the forlorn vagueness left his eyes, to be replaced by a look of steely determination. Suddenly he thrust out his hand and gripped Tom's. His face was very pale, but his step was steady as without a word he wheeled and walked out of the eating house.

Henry Dobbs, for such was the sad youth, strode firmly across the street to the Little Prairie Flower State Bank and walked in. Miss Orrelle Tracy was the only inhabitant, for few patrons ever came in to transact business during the noon hour. She was looking at a picture of Clark Gable in a movie magazine and her thoughts were in Hollywood. She noticed Henry Dobbs even less than usual, which is much the same as subtracting something from zero.

Henry Dobbs didn't possess a six-shooter and neither did the bank, but he knew where there was something that would answer just as well. From the wall he detached a vivid red and gold metal fire extinguisher, grasped the nozzle firmly in his right hand and walked over to Miss Orrelle Tracy. He presented the nozzle to Miss Tracy's temple, and that astonished young lady made the return trip from Hollywood in nothing flat.

"I'm giving you one last chance, Orrelle," growled Henry Dobbs, through what he fondly imagined were gritted teeth.

"Marry me, you dog!"

"Why, Henry Dobbs!" gasped Miss Tracy. "Have you gone crazy?"

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"Where I come from," said Henry Dobbs, who had never been more than twenty miles from Little Prairie Flower in his life, "they raise *men! Men who always get their women!*"

"You certainly are crazy, Henry Dobbs," said Miss Tracy. "I'll tell father about you tonight, and he'll never let you inside the house again. My goodness! The idea! Besides, you haven't got a license."

"Shut up, and lead me to the preacher," gritted Henry Dobbs. More conversationally he added: "Old Reverend Dickson christened me and he knows all about me, Orrelle, and he'll marry us and I can get the license later in the afternoon. Come along or I'll douse you."

Miss Tracy made one last struggle. "You must have eaten something this afternoon that affected your mind—"

"I eat raw meat," said Henry Dobbs darkly. "Raw meat, dripping with blood. Wild West food for a Wild West hombre. It's my night to howl. Yip-pee! My grandmother was Martha Washington or somebody. She always got her man. Stand up, Orrelle!"

Miss Tracy stood up slowly. She told herself that she was obeying because she didn't want her new blue dress ruined by the chemicals, but secretly she did so because she had amazingly discovered a new Henry Dobbs. A Henry Dobbs who ate raw meat and always got his woman and who was descended from Martha Washington or somebody. A Henry Dobbs who handled a fire extinguisher as if he had been born to it. She sketched a mental picture of him, riding hell-for-leather over the plains, a fire extinguisher in each hand, squirting away at the enemy.

"Old Dickson lives right around the corner, honey," said Henry Dobbs. "Walk in front of me, so you won't have a chance to change your mind and run away, you dog!"

Miss Tracy minded meekly. She had no intention of running away. She wouldn't have taken Clark Gable now, if Clark Gables had been retailing at a nickel a dozen.

They turned up the steps to the porch of a house on which was affixed a small brass plate neatly lettered: "Rev. Alonzo K. Dickson."

AS they vanished into the open doorway, Comanche Ike Bloodynose appeared at the far end of the street. Comanche Ike, having once sold his primitive soul into servitude for the Bar-D Ranch shows, had done a good job of it. He had extracted a couple of feathers from an unwilling turkey, which he had thrust in his hair, and his only clothing consisted of a pair of blue-striped running pants and a red blanket over his shoulders.

As he came up the street at a brisk canter, Comanche Ike let out a war-whoop that must have delighted the shade of his most gruesome minded ancestor.

The first person to catch sight of Mr. Bloodynose was Mrs. Elmer Waddell, one of the eleven first vice presidents of the Twentieth Century and-so-forth League and a pillar in the Presbyterian church. Mrs. Waddell had taken Congressman Schultz's speech much to heart, and by rummaging around the house had attained a success she had not dreamed possible.

Her costume consisted of a Quaker bonnet, discarded long ago by some forgotten relative, a purple plush blouse with the sleeves incredibly puffed and stranglingly tight about the forearms, and a black and white

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checked skirt reaching almost to the ankles, which in the nineties was considered the proper regalia for bicycling, and which probably helps to account for the comparatively high mortality rates of those times.

Mrs. Waddell stared at Mr. Bloodynose and Mr. Bloodynose reciprocated. Recognition, while delayed, was mutual.

"Why, Ike," said Mrs. Waddell, "what on earth has come over you? Why, you look simply fit to be tied."

"I might readily reciprocate that remark, madam," Ike returned respectfully.

"Might I inquire—"

"It's Old Pioneers' Day," Mrs. Waddell explained. "No less a person than the President telegraphed Congressman Schultz, and asked the ladies of the League to organize a parade. We're going to have our pictures taken, and things."

Ike began to see the light. He wondered if all the old female pioneers were getting four Annie Oakleys and a finif apiece to look like Mrs. Waddell, and he decided privately that the strain must be worth every nickel of it. But he made no comment.

"She would!" suddenly snorted Mrs. Waddell. "The brazen hussy! Old Pioneer or no Old Pioneer, I consider that positively indecent!"

Mr. Bloodynose looked up. Miss Sabina Jessop had just emerged from her home. Miss Jessop's garb was not as variegated or as colorful as Mrs. Waddell's, but she had achieved one distinctive and sensational improvement. To her waist was attached an ancient horse pistol, which, to Mr. Bloodynose's startled gaze looked at least seven feet long. In lieu of a holster and belt, she had secured it around her middle by means of a cloth tape measure. She walked proudly up the center of the street, not even according a nod to Mrs. Waddell.

"Can you imagine?" said Mrs. Waddell.

BUT we must now return to Joe Salvetto and his cutthroat band.

Captain Salvetto, Lieutenant Malfi, Private Hearse-face and the others had finished their lunches and washed the dishes, because, desperate characters though they were in every sense of the word, there was no use taking chances with deadly germs. Then they piled into two long, low cars and drove to the summit of a small hill overlooking Little Prairie Flower, where they disembarked.

Joe Salvetto, with the cunning of his species, realized that the sight of any strange motor within the municipal precincts of Little Prairie Flower would arouse curiosity if not active suspicion.

Accordingly, his plan was to rob the bank and then scatter and escape under cover of the confusion. The automobiles were drawn up under the shelter of some tall cottonwoods, while the bandits surveyed the scene.

"Looks all completely *à la* Hoyle," said Joe, who had been accustomed to eat in French restaurants and knew the language like a book—some books.

"See that fat woman waddlin' down the street?" Stinger Malfi asked. "I bet I could draw a bead on her right from here." Joe laid a restraining hand on his over-enthusiastic subordinate's arm.

"If you want my opinion—" Hearse-face began.

"Right now we don't want your opinion no more than Wall Street wants congratulations," Joe broke in. "Shut up!"

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"If you want my opinion," Hearse-face continued, "they's too many people in the streets. They all look happy and busy, like they was gettin' up a lynchin' bee or something. I bet a buck that's because it's Friday. I bet you they always have lynchin's in this town on Fridays.

"I'm tellin' you, boss, you're just plantin' tacks in the chair of Fate when you start anything on a Friday, I'm tellin' you."

Joe bestowed upon Hearse-face the disgusted and irritated sort of look one gives when one's best shirt comes home frazzled from the laundry, and turned to Malfi.

"All set, Stinger? I hope they ain't nobody drawn out them payrolls yet."

"I hope somebody just puts up a argument," said Stinger. "I got a mosquito bite on my trigger finger, an' she sure does itch."

"I hope they bury us deep," said Hearse-face. "They got lots of coyotes roundabouts here, an' I understand they got sharp diggin' claws."

"Suppose I bump this raven right off here now, boss," Malfi suggested eagerly. "I could eat him up."

"Go ahead," Hearse-face invited. "'On the eve of his own execution the condemned man ate a hearty supper.' Go right ahead. The whole bunch of you look like a bunch of fingerposts pointin' to the cemetery. Friday!"

Joe quelled the threatened mutiny in the ranks, laying away in the back of his head certain pet Chinese tortures he intended to put Hearse-face through when this little business affair was over. That mention of coyotes and their digging claws gave him a sort of feeling as if he had eaten limburger cheese for breakfast.

"Get goin'," he growled. "An' remember, you most likely won't have to shoot. This is a goody-goody town, from all I hear tell."

ACCORDING to pre-arranged schedule, they separated, each taking his own path and strolling, as nonchalantly as his own particular disposition permitted, into the town. Once there, the arrangement was for every member of the band to duck under cover for a moment, don a mask and then swoop down on the bank in concert with the others at a given signal. It was an ideal system of calculation, but there are a lot of torn up horse-race tickets which are the result of ideal systems.

The Honorable Wes Schultz had just mounted the balcony over the La Belle Marie Olde Dresse Shoppe, and was delivering a preliminary harangue to the assembled ladies of the League, who were increasing in numbers every instant. The Honorable Wes, in his fifty-two years of public service from cradle to Congress, had never missed an opportunity of haranguing, and this time he was in the finest of his numerous and varied fettles.

Modestly conspicuous among the audience was Long Tom Logan. Things were going along more smoothly than he had ever dreamed. For years he had been a showman, but never had he encountered such a spirit of co-operation as that exemplified in Little Prairie flower.

Mr. Marlborough Baggs was here, there and everywhere, snapping pictures of the élite and hoi polloi of Little Prairie Flower with reckless abandon as to his supply of plates. He was acting under carte blanche authorization of the Honorable Wes, who was determined to spread himself and make this the occasion of occasions. Long Tom, as an honored, if slightly mysterious,

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visitor, had been snapped in a variety of poses, and Mrs. Elmer Waddell, Miss Sabina Jessop and Mrs. Otis Milliken were vying for supremacy in the number of pictures taken.

But by far the most popular subject was Comanche Ike Bloodynose, who was accommodatingly posturing all over the street in increasingly savage attitudes, and who was beginning to feel the barbarous blood of his fathers coursing in his veins. Ike had captured a hatchet, maintained by the Milliken hired man for dispatching chickens desired for Sunday dinners, and was rapidly acquiring all the earmarks of the baser redskins of the J. Fenimore Cooper novels.

"My friends and fellow townsmen," the Honorable Wes was saying, "and it is indeed a proud moment for me to-day that I may call you my friends and fellow townsmen, your co-öperation with my ideas—mine and the President's, of course—surpasses my fondest hopes. Dating from to-day, Little Prairie Flower will be engraved in letters of gold on every map in all the nations of this earth. Children yet unborn, in China, in India, in—a—"

"Indiana," prompted Mrs. Milliken, whose folks had been born beside the Wabash.

"Well—ah—all right," the Congressman agreed, for Mrs. Milliken never missed going to the polls, "Indiana, then—well, as I was saying, children yet unborn in all these far-flung places will live to stand at attention and salute the name of Little Prairie Flower, whenever Old Pioneers' Day is mentioned."

"*If* it's ever mentioned," an irreverent voice prompted. It was Dan Strickley, the official ne'er-do-well of the village.

"Well, yes—um—ah—that goes without saying," conceded Mr. Schultz, for Dan was also a voter when sober, and had no conscientious scruples as to how many times he cast his ballot during the day. "But it *will* be mentioned, my friend! It will be a household word, on the tip of every man's tongue—"

HE waxed eloquent and oratorical. A door across the street opened, revealing the rather self-conscious presence of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Dobbs, the latter *nèe* Orrelle Tracy. Ordinarily, their emergence from the home of the Reverend Alonzo K. Dickson would have aroused a storm of comment, but to-day it went completely unnoticed. Arm in arm, with flushed faces, they crossed the street and joined the audience.

—"a nation-wide movement," Mr. Schultz was saying (everything reached a nation-wide movement with him at a certain stage of each address), "which, originating here in Little Prairie Flower under the sponsorship of myself and the President of these United States, will leave no sturn untoned—I mean, stone unturned—until—"

"My goodness!" the former Miss Tracy breathed. "Do you know, Henry, we left the bank wide open and not a soul there? And you've got the fire extinguisher with you! Wouldn't it be simply terrible if they arrested you for stealing a fire extinguisher on our wedding day?"

Mr. Dobbs turned pale, and with good reason. He was as courageous a young man as the average, but there are some things that simply cannot be explained, and the pilfering of fire extinguishers on the eve of one's wedding is one of them. He seized his bride firmly by the wrist, and set off

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at a half canter down the dusty street.

"We got to get it back!" he gasped. "It would never do—"

They cantered up to the bank, arriving just in time to see the backs of six men entering. Close to the right hip of each dangled a gun, and as one happened to turn his head aside, it could be observed that he was masked.

"Now," said Henry Dobbs, not averse to proving that a newlywed could be firm and severe when occasion demanded, "this is carrying tomfoolery too far. It may be Old Pioneers' Day or it may not be Old Pioneers' Day—personally, I never heard of the thing—but I am not going to have the Little Prairie Flower State Bank used as a scene for any funny movie stunt. As a loyal employee, I'm not going to stand for any monkey business."

It didn't occur to him just then that he had left the bank totally unguarded for a full half hour.

"What is oo going to do, oo gweat big strong mans?" asked Mrs. Dobbs.

"You'll find out," Henry threatened mysteriously, not knowing exactly himself what he intended to do. "I guess anybody that eats raw meat and gets his woman don't have to be told what he needs to do. Remind me some day, and I'll tell you about Kit Boone and Martha Washington."

Swinging the fire extinguisher menacingly, he stalked into the bank.

"Now," he said, "you boys better cut this out right now."

A man whirled on his toes and jerked a pistol under Henry's chin. He was a tall, swarthy man, and over his mask his eyebrows grew together in a straight black line. Henry didn't recognize him, but, for that matter, it had taken him three guesses to recognize Mrs. Waddell, Miss Jessop and other life-long acquaintances of the League.

"Say your prayers, you young squirt," ordered Stinger Malfi.

THE appellation of "squirt" brought to Henry Dobbs's mind the fact that he was not defenseless. A joke was a joke and an Old Pioneers' Day was an Old Pioneers' Day, but there was such a thing as turning liberty into license. At least, he thought that was what he meant.

"Who are you calling a young squirt?" asked Henry Dobbs.

"I'm calling you a young squirt," retorted Stinger Malfi.

"Is that so?" demanded Mr. Dobbs.

"Yes, that's so," Mr. Malfi said.

After all, a bridegroom is entitled to some dignity, especially in the presence of his bride. Mr. Dobbs indignantly up-ended his extinguisher, and a stream of juicy polysyllabic chemical compounds hit Mr. Malfi squarely between the eyes. Mr. Malfi went down like the eight-ball in the corner pocket.

"That settles it!" snarled a tall, gloomy looking bandit. He carefully removed all fingerprints from the hilt of his gun with a handkerchief, and laid it on the shelf of the chief teller's counter. "Friday!" said Hearse-face to Henry Dobbs. "Nothing good ever happens out of anything that starts on a Friday."

"I got married on a Friday, if that's what to-day is," Henry said, mentally striving to place the dismal bandit in the category of Little Prairie Flowerites.

"I ain't got the slightest doubt of it," Hearse-face said. "From what I hear, everybody gets married on a Friday. If they didn't, they had ought to. You can have my share of the swag, Joe—I'm going back to Toledo. I got a cousin there which has got a pull and he can get me a job conductin' a street

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trolley car. So long, and don't try to bum no rides if you come out Toledo-way."

He walked out of the bank haughtily, thus ending a promising criminal career.

Disasters were mounting on Joe Salvetto. His first lieutenant was knocked for a loop, his principal private had deserted in the face of the enemy, and confronting him was an indignant young man with a peculiar death-dealing device under his arm.

"Gas!" screamed Joe Salvetto, and made a break for the door.

As it so happened, the parade had just started. The Twentieth Century Far-Western Literary Ladies were marching up Main Street all abreast, since everybody wanted to be in the front rank, with Congressman Schultz leading the way and Mr. Marlborough Bagg skipping merrily about, getting shots wherever they presented themselves. It was at this instant that Joe Salvetto emerged, with a furious glint in his eye.

"My sakes!" exclaimed Miss Sabina Jessop, fully convinced that this was part of the celebration. "Ain't he picturesque?"

Her hand dropped to her side, striking the antediluvian horse pistol, which exploded with a detonation which rang over four counties. A long neglected bullet, about the size of a crow's egg, was discharged, lodging in Joe's shoulder. After that, Joe's interest in the proceedings was wholly theoretical.

"My mistake," Miss Jessop said contritedly.

OUT from the bank filed the rest of the mob, led by a gentleman who bore the nickname of Murderous Matthew.

Murderous Matthew, none too steady on his pins, heaved down a gun. "Stick 'em in the air," he commanded.

He got service more quickly than he expected. "Yip-pee!" yelled the newly barbarized Comanche Ike, conscientiously eager to earn his five dollars and four free tickets, swung his hatchet—the Milliken hatchet to be exact—and it slipped from his hand, missing Murderous Matthew by a fraction of an inch. Murderous Matthew's armory clattered to the ground.

"We're through," Murderous Matthew said. "This ex-boss of ours," he added, stepping meticulously on the recumbent Salvetto's face, "said this was a Sunday school town. Well, maybe. But any burg where they train lady Vigilantes and got Indian ax-throwers —well, I don't want to go to no Sunday school there. We're resignin'."

From nowhere special bobbed up Constable Tonker.

"I'm gonna put you fellers under arrest," he squeaked. "It plumb ruins my record and I don't know who you be, but you're disturbin' the peace. I bet you don't feel so brash after you spend a night in the jail house and maybe get fined five dollars a each in the mornin'. I bet you fellers been drinkin'. Such cut-ups!"

As things turned out, the constable had grossly underestimated the power of the law. The accumulated sentences of the Salvetto gang, minus Hearseface, who escaped, and became, and possibly still is, a trolley car conductor in Toledo, ran up into one of those things that you read on cash registers when you're beginning to wonder if you can afford to take the girl friend home in the subway, or whether she wouldn't prefer to walk for the sake of the air.

Anyway, Henry Dobbs got a large slice of the reward, alive or dead,

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which helped out considerably in the expenses—until the bills started to come in.

Only one person remains to be accounted for—Long Tom Logan, who started the business.

Dan Strickley, the town bum, ran across Long Tom lying face downward in Boulevard Alley about four minutes after Miss Jessop and her horse pistol had laid Joe Salvetto cold. Dan Strickley was looking for a place to lie down himself. He said to Long Tom:

"Move over, pal."

"Is it all over?" Long Tom wanted to know.

"Is what all over?"

"Everything."

"Everything's been all over since I was born," said Dan Strickley. "The last thing I see was Comanche Ike rangin' all over the place with nothin' on except what I'd be ashamed to tell you."

"I mean," Long Tom said, "do you suppose you could get down to the railroad station and get me a one-way ticket to my home town? This place is too Wild West for me. It ain't healthy."

"I might," Dan replied, "if you slip me a quarter on the side. Where do you live, cowboy?"

"Peterboro, New Hampshire," Long Tom said. "Don't forget—one way!"

THE END.

Manicuring an Elephant

IT is well for the attendants at our zoos that elephants are perhaps the most docile patients known and apparently have sense enough to realize that what is being done for them is for their own benefit. In captivity it is necessary at certain periods to trim their feet and pare their nails to keep them in good condition. In the wild state the elephant gets enough walking to keep the soles of his feet worn to normal thickness, which is about an inch, but in captivity this is not the case and they thicken to such an extent as to make walking troublesome, especially as they crack and pick up all sorts of objects which may work up into the quick, causing painful and dangerous inflammation. It is hard to realize just what a varied collection of foreign matter may become wedged into these cracks.

Recently, a zoo surgeon removed from the feet of an elephant the following articles: one set of dice, the bowl of an iron spoon, the handle of a pocketknife, and a large iron nail. All of these objects being picked up by the elephant in a period of about six months.

The principal tools used by the manicurist (and chiropodist) to his Majesty the Elephant, consist of a carpenter's draw-knife and rasp for the soles, and a horseshoer's knife and rasp, with sandpaper for smoothing, for the toenails. The sole is pared down to the right thickness with the draw-knife, then smoothed with the rasp. Then the toenails are cut off with the knife and rubbed smooth with sandpaper.

This is said to be very pleasing to the elephant, who is credited with enjoying his manicure very much.

Earl B. Powell.

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The jayhawkers pulled Cary down

Captain Redspurs

By F. V. W. MASON

Author of "To Be Court-Martialed," "The Snaring of Sergeant Frost," etc.

Capture meant death to Captain Hubert Cary on that daring railroad raid into Confederate territory

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

CAPTAIN HUBERT CARY, Union cavalryman, was doing scout work with a small band of his horsemen in the vicinity of Harper's Ferry, Virginia, when he came across a band of guerrillas, dressed as Yankees, looting a farm. Before Cary learned the true identity of the marauders they escaped. Cary saw, to his horror, that they had killed a boy and tortured an old man.

Captain Cary freed a girl who had imprisoned herself in the farmhouse and she promptly gave the alarm to the Confederates. Cary was captured and was about to be hung when he was saved by the timely arrival of his cousin Craig, who, like the other Southern Careys, spelled his name with an "e."

Craig explained Hubert's true rôle to his captors, telling them that guerrillas had done the pillaging. So Captain Hubert Cary, Northern cavalryman, was taken to Philomont, home of the Southern Careys, as a prisoner of Captain Craig Carey, Rebel cavalryman.

There he met the girl he had rescued, Lenore Duveen, and fell in love with her, although he learned that Craig was also in love with her.

When a Yankee patrol attacked Philomont, Hubert escaped by seizing Lenore Duveen and using her as a shield until he got to his horse. He realized that this would make the Careys and the Duveen girl hate him, but he had learned a military secret of vast importance and would stop at nothing to get back to his headquarters and report.

This story began in the Argosy for September 30.

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The secret was that Harper's Ferry was about to be attacked by General Lee and a large army. Despite the protests of Major MacKenny, who has hated Hubert since their days at West Point, Hubert is given permission to take a handful of men, dressed as Southerners, deep into Confederate territory in an attempt to burn the bridges of the Winchester & Potomac railroad, Lee's chief line of communication.

Cary, known as Captain Redspurs, and his party have arrived at Mount Jackson, have commandeered the train that is just about to start back toward the north, and are attempting to start it amid a hail of bullets.

CHAPTER IX.

BURNING BRIDGES.

MORE shots began to ring out. Hubert Cary could hear slugs clanging against the iron side of the tender like deadly hailstones. Cursing furiously, Brady throttled down and this time applied the steam more gradually. Like a dog shaking itself, the train quivered and then began to roll forward.

"Made it!" was Cary's triumphant cry as with two firemen he crouched amid the firewood. Even Brady was kneeling on the floor of his cab, for shots were still cracking all about.

Steadily the Pocahontas gathered speed and her cab commenced to sway with that sharp, jolting motion which, though alarming to a novice, nevertheless tells an engineer that his locomotive is hitting off a steady, space-eating speed.

Faster and faster revolved the driving wheels of the Pocahontas. Gusts of hot, pitchy smoke swirled out to obscure various gages while the two firemen fed pine slabs into the fire box until the locomotive's smoke stack sent sparks whirling along the swaying car tops like a cloud of tiny meteors.

"Well, we got a good start at last, cap'n," Brady smiled a gap-tooth grin. "I like to died of old age when them drivers raced."

"So did I." At considerable cost to his natty gray civilian clothes, Cary braced his body against the cab's violent jolting, cupped a hand and raised his voice. "Since there can't be a locomotive behind, there's no sense tearing up the track yet, is there?"

"No. But we'd better cut the wires in a minute," bellowed the engineer over the roar of the pine slabs.

"Let Collins take the throttle and you tell me what's what on this line."

After wiping his forehead with the sleeve of his blue flannel shirt, Brady leaned close. "We got to meet and pass a down freight t'other side o' Woodstock Run below Strasburg. We'll have to beat her to a side track there so's to let her by. Then, above Strasburg, we meet the 10.30 out of Charlestown. Shouldn't have no trouble if this blasted rain lets up."

Apprehension shook Cary; what if the bridges got too wet to burn? What if that rider had reached another wire?

Like the ruffle of a drum during a military execution, the rain beat against the windows of the cab. But, in spite of everything, Cary's spirits rose; after all the great adventure was well begun and the rails were clicking out a reassuring song while the dripping hills rolled past.

"A little luck, Brady, and we'll do it. Now throttle her down; we'd better cut the wires."

"Yes," cried Collins nervously, "that's a good idyah. Might be somebody in back there has an extry key."

Twice the Pocahontas's whistle screamed for brakes, then the jolting

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lessened and, sliding along the wet rails, the little train presently came to a panting halt.

From beneath the jacket of a "recruit" appeared a strong cord equipped near one end with a steel hook; a foot above the hook was fastened a lead weight.

"Hop down," Cary snapped, "and be brisk about it."

The fellow did not need to be urged, but leaped down onto the ballast and, watched by his nineteen anxious companions, twice whirled the weight above his head before, with an expert cast, he sent the strong but light rope hurtling over the three bright strands of wire hung from the crossarms. A little cascade of water shook loose when the rope raced over the wires. Promptly the line thrower snapped the hook back about the rope to form an effective noose.

"All set, Collins." Hubert Cary, leaning far out of the cab window, waved a hand. A jet of oily steam burst from the safety valve on top of the Pocahontas's hive-like sand box, and as the train slip onwards the line was snapped taut while he who had cast it scrambled back onto the last car.

When the train had rolled a few yards the rope lashed at the other end to a brake beam neatly ripped down all three of the wires which, with a sharp, harplike *hum-m-m,* went curling back on themselves. The whole operation had not taken thirty seconds, and all the raiders grinned delightedly.

PROMPTLY the doors of that last dirty yellow car slid shut and, to all intents and purposes, it was a harmless special freight with a convincing yellow flag fixed to its pilot that went rattling on through the rain towards the covered bridge which spanned the limpid waters of the North Fork River.

The rain-veiled countryside rolled by in an endless panorama of scattered farmhouses and dog-run cabins, most of which sheltered a few disconsolate looking cows and sheep.

"There she be," Collins yelled suddenly and Cary, leaning out, glimpsed the far end of the covered bridge.

"Stop in the middle of it," he directed, then the stolen train plunged under the shed and the world grew dark and filled with wood smoke.

An instant later the gloom became peopled with hurrying, indistinct figures.

"Take wood from the tender, boys," Cary called above the asthmatic panting of the engine. "Stack it alongside and when we pull forward get a fire going in the middle of the bridge."

Half a dozen men leaped up to help Cary and the firemen pass down dozens of pine slabs while the engineers, Collins and Brady, seized long spouted oil cans and hurriedly lubricated certain vital joints, valves and bearings.

Cary, his heart thudding wildly, presently drew Tatnall aside amid an oily cloud of steam.

"Before long we'll be at Woodstock where we'll have to wait on a siding. Lock those box car doors on the inside and see to it that no one even whispers. We are a special powder train on its way to supply Jackson's army. Understand? If it comes to a show-down I'll sound my whistle—then throw open the doors and shoot—shoot to kill. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," nodded the brown faced veteran. "But dag nab it, I wish we was a-horseback—"

Five minutes later the Pocahontas was steaming out of the far end of the covered bridge followed by a heavy

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wave of blue smoke, and Cary, by craning his neck, could see that flames generated by the heap of firewood were beginning to lick up along the dry inside of the shed. One bridge at least was out of the way—but it was the least important.

Try as he might, Hubert Cary could not quite rid himself of those troublesome qualms aroused in him by that rider who had galloped out of Mount Jackson. He was still conjecturing on that fellow's destination when he thought he heard, faint and far away, the scream of a locomotive whistle.

An unexpected train! Had there been some change in the already disorganized schedule of the Winchester & Potomac? He could see the same fear written large on Collins's Indian-like visage.

"SLAP the fuel to her, boys," Brady urged over an oil-stained shoulder. "It's all up with us if we don't beat that there train to the siding, 'cause they ain't expecting an up-train now and they may run into us if they gits past it."

Even as he spoke his hand sought the whistle cord and he sent four screaming blasts echoing among the green and gently rolling foothills.

Then ensued a nerve racking period during which Brady urged the stolen train to a speed so dangerous that Clayton, the boss fireman, turned a dirty gray and, clinging to a handrail, screamed:

"Slow her down, Joe! These ain't no sixty pound rails."

Clackety - clack! Clackety - clack! chanted the rails so loudly that if the other train whistled again, Cary did not hear it. The possibility that the two trains might crash headon around a curve grew greater and greater. Cary felt his hair tingling at the back of his neck and he peered anxiously ahead.

To ease the nervous tension he presently joined in hurling slabs into the fiery, smoke-spewing maw of the Pocahontas. Again Brady jerked the whistle cord and the stolen train thundered on towards the north and its own inscrutable fate.

All at once the imminent peril faded when a little telegraph station and freight shed loomed into sight around a long curve. Promptly the engineer whistled for brakes.

"Remember now," Cary warned the engine crew, "keep your nerve and let Brady and me do the talking."

A moment later Clayton, the boss fireman, sprang to earth and, running ahead, threw over the siding switch.

Surprise was evident in the Woodstock station, for half a dozen individuals in greasy jeans and overalls defied the driving rain to run out onto the platform when the Pocahontas puffed up alongside. At their head was a tall old man with a tobacco-stained gray beard and suspiciously sharp eyes. Worse yet, two squads of infantry stood and lay about the baggage shed seeking shelter from the rain.

"Why in tarnation when they send a special along do they keep it a secret?"

"Sorry, pardner," grinned Cary, "but this is a powder special. You should have had orders to cl'ar the track right through to Charlestown."

"We didn't get no telegram about yer," snapped the other. "Where from did this powder come?"

"By wagon from Harrisonburg."

EASILY Cary swung down to the platform and turned up his coat collar against the rain. He could feel the eyes of the two baggage men searching him.

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"Where at's Johnnie Faulkner?"

To Cary's intense relief, Brady also descended.

"Johnnie? Oh, he's back to Mount Jack'. Johnnie was took with a chill on the way down, so they put me on."

Suspicion was written in every line of the station master's seamed face, as with a faded Federal overcoat flapping loose about his legs he strode the length of the "special," peering intently at each car. The sight of Raines and the other "guards" in gray uniforms, however, seemed to allay a certain amount of the graybeard's suspicion.

"Heyo, Pop," grinned the Marylander from his post in the first car behind the tender. "You ought to collect double fares on this hyar line."

The station master blew his nose on a blue bandanna. "Double fare? What you mean, Bub?"

"Why sure now, on the W. & P. a fellow travels up and down as much as he travels forward and back."

"Haw! Haw!" Two stupid looking yokels in the telegraph office door burst into loud guffaws.

"Mighty smart, ain't you?" snarled the station master. "Waal, maybe you-all won't be when them Yanks gits a crack at you."

Like sweet music lulling Cary's anxiety sounded the faint screech of a whistle.

"Nine fifteen's late as usual," grunted the station master as he turned away. "And it's damn lucky fer you-all she is. If you-all had met below hyar, the buzzards would be feeding fat to-morrow."

Blue coat tails flapping, the old man turned back across the platform, stopped and muttered a few words to a telegraph operator. With quickening pulses Cary saw the youth glance up, then bend over his instrument, his fingers fairly flying as he tapped out a message.

"Shall we jump him?" Brady murmured.

"Can't," Cary replied. "Switch isn't even clear yet. Send Donaldson—he can read Morse."

He turned to watch the appearance of a huge locomotive with driving wheels a good five feet high.

Brady caught his breath sharply and his hand closed on Cary's wrist like a vise.

"What's wrong?"

"See that red flag on her pilot?"

"Why, yes, what of it?"

"That means there's another train behind this, so we're like to be held here Lord knows how long!"

CHAPTER X.

PURSUIT.

CAPTAIN HUBERT CARY lived a thousand years during the interval which followed, for the other train's crew came crowding over to gaze at the powder special. Its engineer, frowning perplexedly, said to Brady:

"Where's Johnnie Faulkner?"

"He got took sick," Brady grunted as with tallow can he oiled various bearings and bearing surfaces.

"Sick? That's funny, mister. Damned if I think he's sick. He looked all right to me this morning."

"Well, he's sick now. He caught a chill."

Cary meantime, with every nerve humming like a touched harp string, lingered outside the telegraph office in company with Donaldson the "guard," who was also an expert telegrapher. Apparently intent on escaping the wet, the latter read the steady rattle of the

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Woodstock operator's key. Presently he nudged Cary sharply. "They're suspicious about something. That feller's trying to reach Mount Jackson by a relay through Strasburg, Manassas and Richmond."

Cary's heart sank, but he only said, "Let me know the minute he gets an answer."

Cary climbed up in the cab and said, "Look here, Brady, I don't like the looks of things at all. That break in the wire has been noticed."

"Ain't nothing we can do," Brady grunted, "but wait for that second section."

At last it appeared, a long train of box cars which bore out Cary's supposition that before long those empty cars would be occupied in hauling supplies for the Army of Northern Virginia.

Would that endless train of cars ever clear the switch? Cary dismounted again and through the window watched the gray whiskered station agent as he sat beside the operator and pretended to check invoices. A child could have told, however, that his whole attention was on the clicking keyboard.

Donaldson caught his breath sharply: "Richmond operator reports he's clearing the line. You'll have to do something."

Into the station strode Cary, gray eyes hard as agate.

"You've cleared the road ahead for me?" he flung at the station master. "General Gorgas will have your head if you haven't."

"I sent off a couple of wires first," the old man admitted sullenly.

"What! Why, damn your eyes. Stop what you're doin' and send them route orders to Strasburg now. Order the dispatcher to keep this line clear till I report from Winchester."

Cary glanced out of the rain lashed window and saw that the long freight was almost clear of the switch now. True, it was going to stop for wood and water, but it would clear the switch.

"All right," the agent was grumbling, "in a minute."

"In a minute. Hell!" thundered Cary. "This here powder is the most important thing on this line. You'll send that order now, understand?"

So menacing was the gray eyed young civilian's manner that the station master wavered and finally nodded. After all, to interfere with the powder supply for Lee's army might be a serious offense.

"All right, Hank," the station master again blew his long red nose on the blue bandanna, "tell Strasburg to hold up Number 12 out o' Rectortown. Ye needn't have been so danged uppity about it, mister."

"Hey!" Brady was waving vigorously from the cab. "Come on, track's clear!"

"Good-by, mister," Cary called and, taking care not to walk too fast, he clambered up into the locomotive's cab.

BUT just then the key commenced to rattle again and that "guard" who knew the code lingered under pretense of tying his shoe lace, even when the Pocahontas commenced to roll forward. All at once he sprang up and came running over the platform.

"What's the matter?" Cary demanded when he swung up into the cab.

"Quick! Brady, quick!" gasped the "guard," his features ashen. "Get around that bend in a hurry. We've got to cut them wires! Mount Jackson's tellin' 'em about our stealing the train!"

Though the driving wheels clanked faster and faster it seemed to Cary's anguished brain that the little train

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moved at a snail's pace, and ages seemed to elapse before the stolen train halted. Immediately the wire cutting squad went into action, but the Pocahontas had barely started again when behind him they heard the halted freight train's whistle begin a sudden furious screaming.

"God help us! They caught on!" Collins panted as he lifted a scared, sweaty face from his efforts at the fire box.

"If we could have cut that line only a minute earlier!"

"Let 'em catch on," Brady growled. "It'll take plenty of time for the freight to get rid of them box cars."

"But will they?" demanded the telegrapher fearfully.

"They've got to. They can't push all them boxes fast enough to catch us—not in a month o' Sundays. Long before they c'n get started we can break the track."

Then the flight commenced in earnest. Not a man of the raiders but knew that the alarm had been given and that the hunt was up! A mile farther down the track the stolen train halted, whereupon Tatnall and a crew of men labored frantically to lift out a rail. It was hard work since they possessed no proper rail lifting tools, but they toiled mightily with long iron pinch bars such as were part of every freight car's equipment. They had actually got one rail loose from its bed and were attacking spikes securing the other when, from down the track, sounded the hoarse, triumphant scream of a locomotive's whistle.

"They got clear quick!" panted Brady. "I thought we'd have at least ten minutes more!"

"Abandon work and get aboard!" Cary snapped to those men who, stripped to their shirt sleeves, toiled in the driving rain. "No, no, don't leave that pinch bar, we'll need it farther on. Let her roll, Brady!"

The Pocahontas had barely begun to move on, with the wrecking crew scrambling head over heels into the last box car, when around a distant bend appeared the smoke of that freight locomotive they had last seen at Woodstock. Now it roared into sight a quarter of a mile away in reverse and pushing before it a pair of dirty yellow box cars filled to overflowing with armed men.

In order to see better Cary clung to the outside of the cab and peered back through the lashing rain.

Ha! He felt a trifle reassured at hearing the other locomotive's brakes scream and at seeing a sudden high plume of steam shoot up from her escape valve. So close was the pursuing train that he could see details of the equipment of men who came scrambling out of the cars. Some knelt to shoot and a few brandished guns and began running along the track as though they could catch the fleeing Pocahontas.

The more sane ones began pulling the loose rail back into place.

"Close," Cary muttered.

"Too damn close to keep my hair still!" Brady agreed grimly. "But it'll take quite a time to fix that there rail. Slap the fire to her, Clayton—"

On and on roared the stolen train. Through rain drenched hamlet and village it sped with yellow special flags whipping wildly in the misty fall air, and after every station the raiders grudgingly stopped to cut wire. But it was a necessary precaution.

"It all depends," Brady announced, "on whether that there old whiskered goat at Woodstock got a message through to Strasburg before we snaked

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down them wires the first time. We'll know pretty soon."

SCATTERED houses flashed into sight. What awaited the stolen train in Strasburg? A clear track—or a battery of artillery trained along the right-of-way? Old Brady's lumpy jaws were working fast and hard as though there was a quid of tobacco in his cheek; but Cary knew there was not. His sleeve a-flutter, Brady reached for the whistle cord and split the gray daylight with two long and two short blasts. For better or for worse the Pocahontas began to slacken speed when a freight yard and some loading platforms appeared. Wet roofs shone dully on all sides, empty streets stretched away; a mule stood tethered to a gnawed post—Strasburg!

"It's clear!"

And indeed the road at the junction was free. But the joy was brief.

"Look! There's—there's the Rectortown train just pulling in!" Collins cried nervously. "See that big engine—the Resolute over yonder there on the spur?"

Clayton, the pessimist, swore roundly. "Yep, and pointed right to chase us."

"Shut up or I'll slap your jaws!" Brady glared and started up. Clayton subsided.

The Pocahontas and her three freight cars rattled across a double set of switch points and rolled confidently past the station, where guards waved a friendly hand from the shelter of the eaves.

Once the houses had thinned again Cary ordered the wires cut and the now over-heated engine raced on towards the long and critical trestle over Cedar Creek.

"What do you think, Brady, shall we stop to rip up track?" Cary demanded.

"No, take too much time; ever'thing seemed okay at Strasburg anyhow. We'll be at the bridge in a minute now and with that on fire we'll be safe from this end."

Unfortunately the Cedar Creek bridge was not covered and the disastrous effect of the driving rain became obvious when wood from the Pocahontas's fast diminishing supply burned only feebly. Despite overcoats held to shelter the newborn flames the wood only smouldered.

"Gotta have drier wood," Tatnall snapped. "Got any tallow?"

"Just half a gallon. Take that, but you can't have no more o' my firewood," Brady retorted.

"Take your pinch bars and wreck that last box car," Cary snapped. "Quick, now."

The car, none too strongly built, yielded to the assault of the panting and anxious raiders who promptly knocked out the rear end and one of the sides. Fed with splinters, the fire commenced to grow a little and eye-stinging blue smoke beat down to hang low over a rail-swollen creek some sixty feet below. But no real improvement was obtained.

"Get aboard," the engineer called down from the cab. "No use, I'm going to pull forward. They's a stack of ties ahead. You can use 'em for fuel later."

So the Pocahontas dropped the shattered box car and rolled up the rain-slippery rails to a big pile of ties so conveniently stacked there by the Winchester & Potomac.

"Consarned stuff just won't burn in a frog drowndin' rain like this," complained Tatnall, as, with a pinch bar, he strove to stir life into the sullen flames.

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"It's no use," Cary admitted at last. "We'll stand a better chance with the West Branch Bridge; that's covered. Come on—"

"Yeah," panted a blue clad "prisoner," "if we have time. We've wasted nigh half an hour."

"Listen!" some one cried, then, as though controlled by a single wire, every head snapped to the rear. Faintly, but unmistakably, the heavy puffing of a locomotive could be heard coming on from behind.

"After us again!" quavered some one. "And that damned bridge won't burn."

"That's enough ties!" Cary yelled. "Maybe we can stop them yet!"

"Maybe the smoke will scare 'em," some one suggested.

"Here," snapped Cary when the train began to jolt onwards, "six of you use a tie as a battering-ram and break a hole in the end of this car."

IT chanced that the right-of-way ran straight for over half a mile beyond the bridge on which they had wasted so much irreplaceable time, therefore the raiders, once Cary's command had been obeyed, were able to watch the appearance of the pursuing locomotive which, with a distinct flame shooting from its stack, came roaring after them.

"Stopped them!" Tatnall grunted. "I 'lowed they wouldn't dast face that smoke."

But Cary, rain-soaked and smoke-blackened, was still peering through the splintered hole in the box car.

One of the younger men passed a quivering hand over his face. "Thank God!" he panted. "They're backing!"

"Yes, they're backing."

"No! Look! Look!"

A groan of despair went up when it was seen that the Confederate engine, after backing a short distance, was now coming on again. Forward she rushed until her long cowcatcher, projecting a good five feet ahead of the bogies, bored into the smouldering fire and spilled a shower of smoking timbers into the depths of the Cedar Creek ravine.

Once clear, the pursuer sounded a triumphant blast and came pounding along with only one car behind it. Slowly but surely the Confederates commenced to gain though Brady and his crew recklessly sacrificed their fuel supply.

Desperately Cary racked his brain for some way of thwarting the doom which was creeping inexorably up from behind. No doubt now that the Pocahontas, having run over fifty miles at a speed for which she had never been designed, was steadily losing ground to the huge black Resolute.

An inspiration seized him. "Push a tie through that hole and drop another one every time she gains, Tatnall. One might derail her."

"Sand's running low," Brady gloomily pointed out. "Our wheels are beginning to slip on the grade." Cary, who had made a perilous trip forward over the madly swaying box car tops, clapped the engineer on the back.

"Yes, but we're gaining, man, we're gaining. They've got to stop to pick those ties off the track. Tatnall has orders to drop one every quarter mile."

"Sure, it's slowing 'em. By Gobs! we've gained ten minutes already!" Collins was almost hysteric with relief. "Maybe if we can get that shed on West Branch bridge lit the Rebs won't dast run through it."

"Lighted, hell!" snorted Brady. "We're runnin' for our lives now, you fool!"

The lives of these twenty men lay in

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his hands, Cary realized, and it was primarily up to him to bring them safely to their destination outside of Charlestown. He must, however, make sure of at least one bridge; thus far the expedition had accomplished next to nothing. True, the Woodstock bridge had, in all probability, been completely destroyed, but whether the Cedar Creek structure would be even slightly damaged was in doubt.

"Think! Think! You must think!" Frantic voices were clamoring in his brain.

Suddenly he started up.

"Got an idea, Brady. Keep her going," he commanded, "but stop down in the West Branch bridge shed —I'm going back—"

"We can't stop! This engine's bearings are hot and we can't keep up even this speed much longer."

"We'll stop only for a minute—"

Cary laughed a short reckless laugh. "Yes, I've got a good idea—a damned good idea!"

Risking death beneath the chattering car wheels, he clambered over the fast-shrinking fuel supply and was lost to sight amid the rain-lashed smoke.

Far behind the pursuer's whistle screamed as if to say—

"We'll get you—you—you-u-u!"

CHAPTER XI.

WRECKED!

SOME twenty minutes later the grim faced men toiling in the cab and tender of the Pocahontas beheld Hubert Cary, coatless and smoke-blackened, clambering back over the car tops. Collins, glancing back, let out a startled yell on seeing a dense pall of smoke hanging low over the right-of-way.

"Look! The train's afire!"

"Only the last car," Cary shouted while crawling over the remainder of the fuel. "Taking a gamble. We've set it and all the ties afire. How far ahead is that West Branch bridge?"

The engineer thrust his bald head out into the driving rain to study the landscape while Cary mopped a face decked with a confident smile which was wholly counterfeit. There was something deadly, something ominous about the persistency of the pursuers. Twice they had caught sight of the Resolute toiling up a long grade, pushing before it the Pocahontas's shattered box car.

Pulling its single day coach, the Confederate train was gaining on them with a dismaying speed that was checked only to allow the removal of ties thrown from the stolen train. How taut and anxious were the smoke streaked faces about him, Cary was thinking when Brady's voice recalled him to practicalities.

"West Branch ain't a quarter of a mile ahead. What's the idea of the burning car?"

"We'll drop it in the middle of the next bridge," Cary yelled. "We've got a fifteen minute lead now so it ought to set fire to the shed before they get there. We'll block the wheels at this end so they can't push it clear!"

"Cap'n, you shore have a head on your shoulders," panted Clayton as with his teeth he jerked a long pine sliver from the palm of his hand. "Mebbe that'll give us time enough to pull up a rail. Look at that dod rotted car burn! Flame must be trailing back twenty foot!"

Incredibly soon the Pocahontas rumbled out on the West Branch trestle to be promptly lost in the gloom of its shed—a gloom at once dispelled by the ruddy glare of the burning box car.

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Once the dangerously overheated engine had stopped near the middle of the bridge Cary sent his men leaping down to the ties.

Silhouetted and shielding their faces from the orange-yellow flames, they worked like mad to jam the wheels. So veiled with smoke and lit with flame were they that the raiders looked like demons toiling in the Pit when they uncoupled the burning car and thrust ties between the front wheels of this traveling pyre.

"I'll allow *that* will hold 'em," was Raines's verdict when, with the others, he scrambled back onto the last of the Pocahontas's three box cars.

"Hope so," was Cary's laconic comment. "We're sunk if this doesn't work."

So sure of success was the wearied, nerve racked crew that, a quarter of a mile beyond the bridge, Cary ordered the engine stopped a final time to permit the raiders to work with pinch bars at a rail.

"Heave-yo! Heave-yo!"

They heaved and strained with that strength which Nature lends to men in danger of their lives; not one of them but knew death to be thundering up from the south.

HARDLY had one end of the first rail been loosened when a breathless groan arose from the red faced toilers. Had they heard aright? Yes. The furious blast of a locomotive's whistle froze the workers in their tracks. A minute more and the rail would be safely bent, but a warning shout came from a man who had been left at the curve to watch what happened on the bridge.

"They're coming! They're coming!"

Sick with despair, Cary led the rush back to the loose and worn out Pocahontas. As he ran he noticed that their locomotive's funnel was red-hot and that the paint was blistering on her boiler cover. When she commenced to move again the engine clattered strangely.

"Guess we're done for," Brady remarked with fatalistic calm. "We couldn't go so fast now, even if this engine was fit. Only one car behind don't steady her much. Even if we hit thirty miles—which we won't—it's an even bet we'd jump the track."

"Keep her going," Cary choked and with hunted eyes beheld the approach of that relentless pursuer so aptly named the Resolute. Almost hidden by soaring sheets of flame, the great black engine was now pushing before it not only the blazing car but also the shattered car dropped at Cedar Creek. Eventually that, too, must catch fire, but the iron-souled Confederate engine crew were apparently discounting this.

Foot by foot and yard by yard the pursuing engine closed in though Brady coaxed every revolution he could from the groaning, red-hot bearings of his engine.

"It's awful," he yelled. "Listen to the poor old girl groan! She's dying—what shall we do?"

"Jump and scatter after you've reversed our engine. It might wreck 'em."

White-eyed and already feeling the fatal noose about their necks, the engine crew watched Brady's hand close over the worn brass throttle, but then the unexpected happened. The wooden frame timbers of the blazing car must have disintegrated, for, all of a sudden, flaming boards, stanchions and braces flew in all directions. In a split second the shattered car's trucks were derailed and it spun squarely across the track to derail the Resolute and to send the engine plunging crazily

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back and forth over the ties, spilling its crew right and left until ultimately it toppled over amid blinding clouds of steam.

Hysteric cries of triumph burst from the raiders' throats, and Cary almost collapsed on the engineer's driving seat.

IN a trice the grim specter of Doom vanished and Hope wiped the anxious lines from their faces. So great was the raiders' relief that when a little farther on, at Kernstown, they found a single passenger car left on the main line by a local engaged in switching, they slowed down to pick it up and, oblivious of the startled yells of the passengers still in it, pushed it triumphantly off towards the last bridge.

"We'll give 'em the ride of their lives till we shunt 'em off on that spur outside of Winchester," exulted Brady. "Listen to them squawk!"

Every one was talking now, planning to snatch Victory from the rending claws of Defeat. No more pursuers, an open road and, best of all, the rain was letting up.

Cary felt like singing as he studied the frightened faces in that car just ahead. Life was once more a joyous adventure, and in his mind's eye he reveled to see that all-important bridge over Opequan Creek reduced to ashes.

After stopping once to cut the wires, the Pocahontas settled into the last stretch of her run. Up and up she panted among the foothills of the Blue Ridge. The dripping woods came down closer to the tracks and the weary engine labored like an overladen beast of burden.

"Be over the top in a minute," Brady called. "And then it's only seven miles to Opequan."

"Fine! Splendid! You men have been marvelous. Nothing can stop us now, I—" The sentence ended, for Cary was thrown from his feet while the gray sky resounded to a deafening, heart shaking crash. Bodies were flung against Cary's as the Pocahontas commenced to buck like a huge bronco of steel.

Woods and sky wheeled dizzily about—screams, the snarling crackle of breaking wood, the brittle jangle of smashing glass were fleetingly recorded in Cary's ears. Then the wrecked engine leaped like a speared fish and followed the Kernstown car over a ten-foot embankment to plunge her pointed cowcatcher five feet deep into the earth.

Shaken from his hold, Hubert Cary was flung free and began to roll furiously down the embankment away from a hell of spurting steam and crashing timbers. Then his head came in contact with a stump and, amid a blinding blaze, he lost consciousness.

CHAPTER XII.

CAPTURE.

THE strong reek of burning wood smoke was tingling in Captain Hubert Cary's nostrils; that was his first definite perception as he gradually recovered consciousness. Next he realized he was hearing groans and cries and—could those be shots?

A heavy trampling shook the ground near his head and a hoarse voice drawled, "That thar one's daid, Gurney, let him be. C'mon, Cash, we-uns better be high-tailing out of these parts."

Sulphurous oaths accompanied some one's assent. "By the prong on the devil's tail, they's sumpin' mighty queer about all this."

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"Yeah, warn't no uptrain due now."

Feet trampled again and somewhere a woman cried out sharply as in pain.

"Heyo, Cash, this guy hain't daid, his eyes is open. Look at that gol' watch."

Cary felt his watch snatched away, then there ensued a scuffle, followed by a snarling curse. "Lay yore dawg's paws offn hit, I saw hit fust."

"Hey!" A boot toe none too gently prodded Hubert Cary's inert form, but he didn't move, his insides felt too cold and queer. Then he remembered he was captured and captured out of uniform. Too bad he hadn't died in the wreck. Of course these Rebels would hang him out of hand. Well, he hoped he'd have courage enough to make a good end.

The boot kicked him again, this time back of the ear. "Git up and quit playin' possum."

Cary struggled to raise his head, but an overpowering nausea made him relax again on the wet leaves.

"Hain't none too pert at that," grunted the voice of the man addressed as Gurney. "Reckon we-all had better knock him off. He's too bad hurt to take along."

The metallic *click* of a revolver hammer being drawn back accomplished miracles in restoring the stricken cavalry captain to consciousness.

"No, no!" he choked, at the same time making vague motions with his hands.

"Oh, so you wuz playin' possum, wuz you? Get up, you wuthless hound!"

Another kick that made Cary's teeth rattle took him under the shoulder and the world rushed crazily about him when he succeeded in raising himself by clutching a young birch. Gradually his eyes cleared to reveal a sight horrible beyond description.

Soldiers in gray, afoot and ahorseback, swarmed all over the débris-littered right-of-way and poked at the wrecked Pocahontas, which lay on her side still sending skywards small feathers of steam. The box car which had contained Tatnall and his men was blazing brightly and, watching the conflagration, stood perhaps two dozen lanky individuals in butternut or gray uniforms.

A SUDDEN rattle of shots made the dizzied Federal choke. These men weren't losing any time in executing spies.

"Help—don't kill me! Don't, please don't!" Collins, the assistant engineer, had suffered a broken leg and, trailing it behind him, he was struggling off like a crippled animal.

"Stop it, you damned butchers!" Hot but futile revolt surged in Hubert Cary's soul. These men acted more like thieves than soldiers. Why, yonder half a dozen fairly well dressed privates were searching a pile of dead civilians heaped alongside the track. One of them callously turned up the skirts of a woman and searched her stocking tops for money which he presently exhibited in triumph. Others were clambering in and out of the derailed but not upset coach, and back at the edge of the woods stood a little group of prisoners consisting of three women and half a dozen men.

Of the raiders it seemed that less than half a dozen survived. Among these were Tatnall, Brady and the fireman called Clayton. Apparently, with the exception of the gaunt Rhode Islander, such men as had been in the Pocahontas's box car had perished.

Still too sick and too shaken to perceive matters closely or to conjecture upon his fate, Cary was nevertheless

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aware that this body of Confederates had two leaders. He overheard something about "Got to separate!" "My fust choice!" "Yep—meet up at the cross roads come Sunday—"

Why take civilians prisoners? Then it occurred to Cary that these might be unfortunates held as hostages — both sides having begun that pernicious practice.

His brain moved like a mass of cold glue, yet it warned him that there was something wrong about all this. Something very wrong indeed. He was trying to reason out the dazed problem when a mounted squad of rough, bearded privates with brutal thrusts of their carbine butts divided the prisoners into two groups and, to his dismay, all others of his party were allotted to the first gang.

"Yes, you, git over thar! Git a move on."

The next thing he knew the men dressed as soldiers had split up into two parties of equal size and, laden with miscellaneous plunder, were moving off. One detachment started away from the opposite side of the track, but that unit of two men and two women to which Cary had been assigned headed down a path leading towards a dark and forbidding pine woods which extended in an unbroken expanse to the bold summit of the Blue Ridge range.

Fighting down a continual nausea, Cary stumbled awkwardly along the trail down which the gray clad men were leading their little group of prisoners. The wet branches drenched him again and again with cold showers which, in a way, was fortunate, for it helped to clear his aching head.

He began to study his captors as they walked along, rifles held ready and peering about like ranging beasts. Most of these Indian-visaged and hawk-nosed men in gray wore their hair down to their shoulders and had great bushy beards that more resembled the manes of so many animals than the hair of human beings.

At the head of the rain-drenched column strode a hulking individual on whose sleeves glimmered the broad yellow stripes of a Confederate first sergeant. Cursing at the weather, at the luck and at his stumbling prisoners, he was parting the branches with vicious thrusts of tremendously long arms. Curiously enough Cary fell to imagining he had seen those wide shoulders before somewhere. Where?

HIS clumsy efforts to remember were interrupted by a faint gasp somewhere behind him and a woman's voice falteringly cried:

"Oh—oh, I—I can't walk so fast. Please—please go slower."

"Yuh gotter keep up—get a move on yer," rasped a guard and enforced his command with the switch he had cut from a bush.

Cary heard the exhausted creature utter a sharp wail and fall, but luckily the trail now ended in a deep ravine, where, beneath a clump of pines, perhaps fifteen or twenty horses stood picketed and nibbling at grain scattered on the earth. There came forward a trio of guards as wild and evil looking as those men who had wrecked not only the Pocahontas, but that raid upon which Hubert Cary had gambled so much.

"How did ye make out?" bawled a horse holder as he swung up into the saddle and came trotting through the pines.

"Wa'nt wuth the trouble," replied the broad-shouldered leader. "A Yank raid wuz on and we didn't git that Rectortown train."

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Just then Hubert Cary suffered a major shock when the leader, on reaching the floor of the ravine, turned about and pulled off his wide brimmed felt hat to beat it free of rain drops. In a flash there returned a vision of that pleasant little farm near Philomont, of the horse tied outside of it, and the black bearded Union sergeant. Here was that same man again, but this time clad in gray! No, there could be no mistaking the wolfish visage of Luke Archer, the dreaded jayhawk leader.

"Wal, now let's see whut we've got—" After mounting up, Archer scanned the small heap of clothes and property collected by his followers.

Cary turned when a woman behind him uttered a stifled gasp and cried, "Oh-h—it's that beast Archer!" Because of the jayhawkers crowding about he could not see the speaker, but some inscrutable instinct told him that she who had cried out was Lenore Duveen! The Golden Diana once more a prisoner of Luke Archer? More vivid recollections returned—he saw her in that farm bedroom, disheveled and ready for murder or suicide.

Chilled with the horror of the situation, he tried to assure himself that this was some trick of his imagination—it could not be she. But, like a sentence of doom, he recalled Lenore Duveen's words at Philomont, "Yes, I'm going south to Salem to-morrow—if the railroads are still running."

What monstrous irony that the Pocahontas should have snatched before it that coach containing the Golden Diana and sent it hurtling into the hands of these human wolves.

Realization of his worst fears came when, a moment later, he glimpsed the Duveen girl, her features rigid with despair. Apparently she had not as yet recognized him. So streaked with smoke and so grimed with dirt were the remnants of his civilian suit, it was not strange that neither she nor Archer had recognized him. But when she did see him, Lenore Duveen would probably put him on a par with these barbarous marauders.

"Mount up! Mount up!" roared the jayhawk leader to the scowling thieves about him. "Put this hyar trash on the mules. Hope you gals kin ride, 'cause—"

In mid-speech Archer paused, vented a thunderous oath, then sent his horse surging towards that spot where Lenore Duveen's lissom figure stood outlined against a holly thicket.

"Boil my body!" he shouted. "Why hyar's my little Goldilocks again! Look, Scroggs, remember her?"

"Yeh, or she looks a lot like that hell-cat we-uns caught on t'other side o' the mount'."

SMALL, bloodshot eyes alight, Archer reined in. "I reckoned I'd played a losing hand on this hyar deal, but blamed if I don't hold the wild kyard after all. Hello, Honeybee, how you doin'?" The jayhawker, with a sudden swoop, bent low and lifted Lenore up onto his pommel.

"Let me go—oh, you—" She got no further, for the assembled marauders made the pine woods echo with deep shouts of laughter as Luke Archer bent his unlovely head to shower kisses on the quivering face of the girl who fought and twisted in futile rebellion.

For a horrified moment Hubert Cary remained rigid with fury, watching the girl's body strain against her captor's while her small fists beat ineffectively against Luke Archer's scar-seamed visage.

Frightened at this wild commotion,

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the marauder's horse had commenced to rear and plunge when Cary, with a sudden right hook, sent one of his lanky guards reeling sidewise. When the next rascal gave way before his blazing eyes he hurled himself at the horse's bit and forced the startled animal to rear well back on its haunches.

Archer, in order to stay in the saddle, was forced to release the girl, whose yellow-red hair had come loose to tumble like a ripple of sunshine over her shoulders. Cary caught her half upsidedown as she spun earthward and eased her to the ground.

"Hell's roarin' bells! Kill that hellion!"

A jayhawker, leaping in from behind, caught Cary in a strangle hold and tried to wrench him over backwards, but the prisoner, suddenly reaching around, gripped his assailant's collar and jerked the fellow over his head in a wide arc.

The thrown man's fall forced his companions back so Cary had time to snatch a pistol from the fallen outlaw's belt, whip it up and sight full into the passion-distorted face of Luke Archer. He had him! Archer knew it, too. Cary squeezed the trigger, but, instead of a report, there followed only a dreadful, dry *click!* The bearded face above lit and stained teeth shone in a terrible grin.

Ravening like deerhounds, the jayhawkers pulled him down on his back. Hands clawed at his throat; a bowie blade glimmered before his agonized eyes, eyes that glimpsed Lenore Duveen gazing at him in stunned wonderment.

"Quit that!" Archer's horse, violently spurred, scattered Cary's captors in all directions and steel shod hoofs momentarily flashed over the fallen Federal's face. "Blast ye all for numskulls! Put that damned knife by, Cash. This weasel will give me a hell's mint o' fun 'fore I'm shet o' him."

They stripped Cary to his blue checked cotton shirt and bound his hands behind him with such tightness that they promptly gave the prisoner exquisite torture. Soon all the outlaws were mounted save three. These shoved Cary astride a gaunt and bony gelding which, having no saddle, galled its rider with a backbone sharp as the Blue Ridge itself.

Cash, a sandy-haired jayhawker wearing a round felt civilian's hat and a gray shell jacket doubtless stolen from a murdered Confederate trooper, commenced to tie Cary's ankles beneath the gelding's lean belly.

"Jest so's to make sure ye won't turn up missin' at the doin's to-night."

"But look here," the prisoner protested, "if this brute falls on these narrow trails—"

"Reckon you'll fall with him, and mebbe you'd be better off if he did." The sandy-haired ruffian dealt his prisoner a stinging cuff on the face by a way of valediction. "Mebbe that'll learn yuh to git uppity."

CHAPTER XIII.

ROGUES' REFUGE.

IT seemed that an endless, agonized century had elapsed before the rain-soaked column came to a halt in a small valley concealed high up in the Blue Ridge range. At one end of this retreat there was a cavern which must have served as a more or less permanent base for Archer's marauding expeditions. A pair of bandaged guerrillas had a fire going before the cavern's entrance, and these got up to greet the straggling expedition with hoarse inquiries.

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A few rough lean-tos built amid a magnificent pine grove to the right of the cave's mouth afforded a further shelter for the men, but Cary found it significant that the horses were protected by a carefully constructed shed which had been partitioned off to prevent their kicking each other.

The other male prisoner dropped his hostility to mutter in Cary's ear: "Thank the Lord, the rain has stopped. I'm pretty nearly frozen."

"So am I." When he once more stood on the ground the captive cavalry captain's teeth were chattering loud as the bones of a minstrel end-man. Not much warmth or protection to that thin cotton shirt which was all the marauders had left on his shoulders, and his bound hands, as he stood there under the dripping pines, had gone quite numb.

The women prisoners, it seemed, were to be better treated, for two of the jayhawkers now came from the cave bearing in their arms a couple of grimy blankets.

"Heah you are, gals," one of them called out. "Tuck these about yourselves till Luke decides if you-all kin go inside—"

"Pleasant swine!" Cary shivered. "Hanging's too good for 'em—"

"My name's Kernan, Hobson Kernan," the other prisoner began. "I'm a grain dealer and was on my way to Richmond when your train picked up my car." His eyes bared whitely through the gray and cheerless twilight. "Why did you do it?"

"It's too long a story to tell now," shivered Cary. "Did they leave anything sharp on you—a penknife, perhaps?"

"Nary a thing," the grain dealer sighed and blew a drop of water from the end of his pointed nose. "'Pears like we're in for it, good and proper. What do you reckon they'll do with us?"

"Try to make you pay ransom, I suppose."

"Me? Why not you?"

"You saw what I did before we mounted up—besides that, Archer has an older score to settle with me."

"Then you've seen that bushwhacker before?"

"Yes. I know enough to hang that scoundrel a dozen times."

The prisoners lapsed into a miserable silence while, with sullen eyes, watching the jayhawkers rub down their horses and then kindle some fires before their lean-tos. About fifteen in all they were.

"Reckon you-all kin git up and move around," grudgingly remarked one of the younger jayhawkers. "'Tain't no use for you-all to ketch a never-git-over."

SEIZING this opportunity, Hubert Cary presently limped over to where Lenore Duveen sat comforting the hysterical young woman who was her only female companion. He stood before them in silence a moment, looking down at her thorn ripped skirt and the torn stockings which revealed many a bruise and scratch.

Although she must have been aware of the captured spy's presence, Lenore Duveen made no effort to look up until he spoke.

"I seem doomed," said he miserably. "I want to tell that I am sorry—to cause you unhappiness, even though I don't suppose that anything I can say will make any difference."

Her look flicked him like a whip and had he been a complete stranger she could not have been half so coldly impersonal.

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"Your assumption, Captain Cary, is quite correct," said she in level tones more withering than blazing invective. "Please go; Mrs. Ross is very tired."

"I know you loathe me," he assented in low tones, "and not without reason. However, I am going to try to get you out of this. So please cooperate—"

Deliberately she raised a face that was drawn and somehow refined by weariness. "I don't imagine you would understand, but it happens that I would rather die than accept help from you." Then, with a gesture of unmistakable finality, she turned aside to draw the blanket higher over her companion.

Cary nodded—he had expected such a reaction, and yet he had not. Lenore Duveen of the sharp wit and the clear insight he had hoped might understand—might see into the underlying motive of his act at Philomont. Numbly he turned aside to see Archer talking to the grain dealer and standing before the fire; threads of steam were climbing from his wet breeches legs.

"Five thousand greenbacks," the jayhawk leader was saying. "Not a cent less."

"But—" cried Kernan desperately, "but I haven't even two thousand to my name."

"Ye'd better find it," Archer tugged at his great, fan-shaped beard, "or we'll stake ye out on the mountingside and let the buzzards at you. And you," his scar flamed as he turned on Cary, "I bin thinkin' 'bout ye. Kain't quite decide jest which idyah's the best. Get in thar, the hull kit an' boodle of ye!" He flung a gnarled forefinger at the cave's entrance, which yawned like the maw of some colossal animal.

Presently all four prisoners were squatting in miserable silence on a pile of hay which yielded a moldy aroma. Despite urgent pleas for release, both men still had their hands bound behind them. Between them and the cave mouth squatted a quartet of long-haired jayhawkers, who kept ostentatiously cocked Spencer carbines across their knees. Beyond the guards a large fire flared continually to outline them in its ruddy glare.

"There'll be hell loose before long," said Kernan in a scared whisper. "See that moonshine?"

Cary looked and saw a demijohn of corn whisky beginning to circulate among the animal-like marauders. Before the outlaws had half cooked their supper, Scroggs, Archer and half a dozen other figures in muddied uniforms were bawling out a mountain ballad about certain obscene happenings "Down in the Lehigh Valley."

Presently Jed, the young jayhawker, who had told Cary he might move about, entered the cave bearing two large bowls of "slumgullion," as he called it.

"But we can't eat with our hands tied behind us," Kernan protested. "Can't you turn us loose long enough to eat?"

"No, reckon I can't. Hit's agin Luke's orders. Mebbe them gals'll fix to feed ye. You kin make these hyar bowls a lovin' cup."

Sniggering, the jayhawker shuffled back out to the fire where the outlaws were eating noisily.

"COME, Mrs. Ross," Cary heard Lenore say, "you really must eat a bit of this stew—you must keep up your strength."

"Why?" whimpered the other. "Oh—I—I want to die. I know what they're going to do to us. No, no, if I have less strength maybe I'll die quicker. O Lord, save this poor sinner." And the dis-

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tracted young creature fell to mumbling snatches of prayer until Lenore Duveen took her firmly by the hand and lifted a spoonful of stew to her trembling lips.

"Stop your nonsense," she commanded sharply, "and eat this. There *is* hope as long as you keep up your courage. I'm facing the same fears and—I—I'm going to eat."

Cary, filled with admiration at Lenore Duveen's strange poise, watched while the Ross woman, a pretty little brunette of about twenty, obeyed and commenced to eat, slowly at first, and then hungrily. She must have felt better for presently she pushed her wet hair from her eyes and murmured, "I—I'm sorry, Miss Duveen. I—I'm afraid I'm not very brave, but I—I'll f-feed Mr. Kernan if you will f-feed the—the other g-g-gentleman."

Cary, suffering from a twinge of his swollen wrists, was not aware of Lenore Duveen's approach until her slender silhouette eclipsed the firelight. He started up, but relaxed.

"Since your hands are tied," said Lenore Duveen, her face a pallid mask, "I suppose I'll have to feed you."

The injustice of her attitude stung him into a childish retort.

"You have to do nothing of the sort, Miss Duveen," he rasped as he turned to look out at the fire. "I've gambled and I've lost. I know it without being reminded. I prefer to get the payment over with as quickly as possible."

"Mock heroics." Her tone was more cutting than the expression in her anxiety widened eyes. "Here, eat this." She might have been speaking to a sullen child and so infuriated him the more.

"Thank you, no." He fixed a pain-brightened look on her. "Why aren't you consistent? Since you despise me you might as well spare yourself the strain of being kind to me."

"I don't care a rap for your finer feelings." Lenore Duveen's dimly seen face became whiter than ever. "But I do know that you should eat. After all, you have Mrs. Ross to consider, she—the poor girl—was only married last month. You must get her away from this horrible place—"

Lenore Duveen had uttered not a word of fear or concern for herself. Cary suddenly was ashamed of his petulance.

"Perhaps you're right," he quietly agreed. "I have been unreasonable."

Accordingly he swallowed the coarse pork stew which she skilfully dipped up with a clumsy pewter spoon.

"Thank you," he said simply. "You must eat."

Lenore Duveen nodded, got up and, reseating herself a few feet away, finished the second half of the stew as calmly as if it had been one of those dainty dishes served at Philomont.

Cary sank back somewhat refreshed—he had not eaten since leaving Harper's Ferry half a lifetime ago. For some reason Hubert could not fathom, Kernan and the Ross girl were herded out under armed guard and marched down the hill.

Minutes dragged by while, outside, the brown and white demijohn was passed more quickly about the circle and those nasal, whining voices outside grew louder. That something decisive would soon happen Cary was sure. The gigantic outlaw leader's voice came roaring through the wood smoke.

"Yessuh—never in my bawn days hev I seen sech a gal—I declar' I feel like—like, why, dammit boys, like I wanted to marry her."

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Scroggs, the vulpine lieutenant, held up the liquor jug. "Marry? Haw, haw! Best licker up, Luke—yore still sober."

Archer's hand flew to his bowie. "Shet yer polecat's face—Joel Scroggs—and jest one o' you billies look cross-eyed at my Goldilocks and I'll spill his blood onto his boots—"

INSIDE the cave, however, ruled the silence of the grave. Lenore Duveen, fashioned in marble, sat rigid and waiting.

Captain Hubert Cary lay on his side carefully watching the various actors in the saturnalia taking place beyond the fire and cursing inwardly because the fire was being allowed to burn low. Damn! He could no longer see to count how many times that stone jug made a circuit of the revelers.

Three, four and now two more outlaws had, in drunken slumber, sunk to the wet earth. Only Archer and six others were still on their feet.

Narrowly, the cavalryman studied those two guards at the entrance. One of them was nodding, the other had gone to sleep.

"Come here," Cary called in a hoarse whisper. "Come quietly."

Apparently Lenore Duveen did not hear him. He rolled over cautiously.

"Lenore Duveen! Come here!"

The girl's head swayed up, she stared, nodded and then, setting her lips, crawled on hands and knees to his side. He could barely distinguish those dark spots which must be her eyes.

"Yes?"

"Untie my hands."

It was slow work and he felt her small cold fingers slipping as they wrenched at the knots, but eventually the work was done. Furiously he beat his deadened hands together while she cast loose that belt which had secured his ankles.

"No. Don't take it off," he warned. "Just leave it loose."

He talked as best he might while he moved his arms behind his back until the agony of renewed circulation told him that some strength had returned. A wild song, loud and off-key, made hearing difficult, and she stooped so near that her ear almost touched his lips.

"Archer will come for you before long," he breathed. "When he does you must keep him in here."

She fixed him with horrified eyes. "What!"

"You must." His voice was savage. "Play up to him. Get him to take you all the way back into the cave."

He could hear her breath quicken before she said, "Go on."

"Put up a little fight, but let him think you're going to give in. I'll wait my chance. Can you do it?"

In the uncertain gloom of the cavern which smelled like a long disused cellar, he could read doubt, fear and disgust in her glance.

"I—don't think I can do that," she whispered, "but I—I'll try. Don't risk your life for me if you expect any reward; I loathe and despise you, and always will."

"I expected you to," he whispered, "but I owe you this." Then he rolled over into his former position while she crept back to lie down on her pile of mouldy straw.

Cary's prediction was fulfilled some twenty minutes later when a huge, Neanderthalian figure became outlined against the glow of the coals. Outside only two voices now were raised in inarticulate song and the snuffle and stamp of the stabled horses could be clearly heard once more.

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Feigning sleep, but tensed in every fibre, Cary, from under lowered lids, watched Archer's stealthy approach; now he moved unsteadily by the guard, who only glanced upwards and then fell to nodding again.

"Heyo, Honeybee."

Lenore Duveen did not answer, but Cary could hear her sharply indrawn breath.

"Don't be scairt, little Honeybee; ol' Luke may look rough, but he don't aim to hurt yer none."

THE intruder's shadow, thrown on the fire-tinted roof of the cave, towered titan-like above the prostrate cavalryman whose blood seemed to halt, to flow back on itself. What if the jayhawker leader stooped to investigate his lashings and found them loose!

"Oh—oh—please don't—don't take me outside there. Please!" So convincing was Lenore Duveen's terrified sobbing that Cary wondered whether she was really losing her nerve. He prayed she had not; everything would be lost if she had.

"Sho', now, Honeybee, come on outside. Hit's warm by the fire."

Came faint struggles and the shuffling of feet. "Oh—oh, Mr. Archer, I—I'm afraid of those men. Couldn't you—"

"Couldn't I whut, Honeybee?"

How the ruffian stank! Lying three feet away Cary could smell Archer's foul body odors mingled with the smell of horses and the reek of whisky. It would be no small wonder if Lenore Duveen lost her nerve.

"What wuz you a-goin' to say?" inquired Archer in surprisingly gentle tones.

"I—I thought we could be—more comfortable here." Every word seemed to be dragged from the girl's lips as by invisible windlass.

"Haw-haw. So did I— Ha-ha. Ain't you the cute li'le coon cat? Give old Luke a kiss, Honeybee, jest to prove you ain't foxing."

A loud smack sent electric thrills of rage through the cavalryman's chill and aching body as he remained motionless on the mouldy hay. He'd never forget that odor as long as he lived.

"Wal now, that's better, Honeybee. And say, ye're mighty purty—I—I got kinder took with yer the first time we met on t'other side o' the mountings. Yep—I bin thinkin' a heap about yer."

"And I too—" came Lenore's trembling voice. "I remembered and liked you. But you, you frightened me then. You—you are so strong, s-so masterful. To-night, though—"

"Tonight, Honeybee?" A new, almost awed, note had crept into Luke Archer's hoarse voice. "Do yu' really want me?"

"It—it's more comfortable back in the cave—"

The jayhawker leader laughed delightedly. "You sho' fooled me with yer high and mighty ways, Honeybee, but ye won't be sorry, Honeybee, 'cause I'm rich—and I'll be richer 'fore this war ends. Yep, I got a heap o' diamond rings, gold necklaces, all waiting for a pretty body like yourn. Funny, all day I wuz figgerin' on how ye'd look in 'em—even 'fore I found yer agin. Won't be no gal dressed nigh so smart as Luke Archer's woman."

Archer evidently bestowed three or four more kisses, then there sounded footsteps which diminished as the two groped into the farther recesses of the cave.

Cary lay without moving a muscle,

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but every nerve was on edge. What was happening outside? As if in answer to his unvoiced prayer a fagot end, falling into the fire, flared up to reveal only the guard at the cave's mouth, and he was nodding.

Cary's nerves crisped when from the depths of the cavern came the sound of a muffled voice raised in protest.

"Easy, Honey, easy, I ain't goin' ter hurt you—" This much Cary heard, then, with the silence of a ferret on the hunt, he commenced to creep inch by inch into the almost tangible blackness of the depths of the cave. It was slow work, for the fire had again sunk very low, but here and there an outline still was recognizable.

Patiently the cavalryman squirmed onwards, his body pressed very flat to the clammy rock floor. Ha, he could distinguish them now; Archer was seated with his back to the fire and Lenore Duveen was lying across her captor's chest looking up at him, her eyes dim and very large.

Cary drew nearer, clutching a large stone. Now he gathered himself, abruptly rose to his knees, and with furious force brought the stone crashing down on Archer's head, just as any caveman might have struck his enemy.

CHAPTER XIV.

FLIGHT.

WHILE he crouched over the lax, malodorous form of Luke Archer, Captain Hubert Cary was conscious of but two things: first, Lenore Duveen was staring at him from wide, horror-filled eyes, and, second, that the guard at the door had got up. Shaken with anxiety, Cary watched the blanketed outlaw stumble out and kick together the ends of the fire. It flared up, revealing all the prone figures in the cave. Would the guard, on returning, look inside and see what had happened?

"Lie still beside Archer," he whispered and flashed her an encouraging smile before scrambling to assume his original position.

While the guard cursed his drunken companions and sought firewood, Cary had time to marvel at Lenore Duveen's courage. Obediently she had stretched out beside the unconscious jayhawker, who lay on his back, spurred boots and yellow striped gray legs spread wide apart. Curious, how the fire caught certain contours of the ruffian's throat, and revealed his beard thrust upwards at a sharp angle.

While he lay in enforced inaction, Hubert Cary tried to estimate the likelihood of escape. There was, he knew, a long Navy revolver buckled outside of Archer's desecrated gray uniform, and a bowie knife, common enough among Confederate troopers, balanced it on the other side. If he could get to that guard unawares and kill him without noise there might be some chance of escape.

His conjectures ended when the guard came shuffling back, yawning and swinging a wooden canteen in one hand. Without looking inside, the outlaw sat down and presently hunched forward with elbows around knees and a carbine slung across his lap. Sleepily, he pushed a shapeless gray képi well back on his shock of long yellow hair and settled into a drowse.

When all was still save for the drunken snores of the jayhawkers, Cary rolled over on his side to face the Duveen girl and Archer. Motioning for silence, he secured the unconscious outlaw's knife and revolver before beginning a stealthy advance towards the

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nodding guard, who had by now slumped still further forward.

Teeth clenched, Cary calculated his thrust—yes, just under the outlaw's left shoulder blade. He aimed the point and poised it almost against the gray cloth before driving in the six-inch blade with all his force. A long sigh escaping from the guard's lips was the only evidence that Cary's thrust had gone home as calculated.

In the gloom Cary beckoned Lenore forward. "Come."

HOLDING high her skirts and petticoats to avoid tripping, Lenore Duveen stepped towards the cave mouth, but so hampered were her movements that Cary was inspired to snatch up some garments drying beside the watch fire. Eyes testing every shadow and with cocked revolver ready, he took her hand when once they had stepped over the collapsed figure of the guard, whose haversack Cary decided to appropriate.

Lenore Duveen meanwhile gathered her skirts still higher and tighter lest they catch on the surrounding shrubbery. Even in that tense moment Cary could not help noticing how very long and well shaped were her legs.

Silent as wind-blown snowflakes and picking every footstep, the fugitives now made their way towards the pine grove among the unlovely sleeping figures which lay sprawled on heaps of hay.

Cary led his companion into the farther depths of the grove and thrust towards her a pair of breeches and a coat from the bundle under his arm.

"Put those on," he said as he struggled into a civilian coat at least a size too small.

"Oh, I—I can't," she protested. "They're filthy!"

"Put them on!" he snapped. "You can't get through woods in that dress."

So savage was his look that she turned and, without a word, made her way into the deeper shadows. Meanwhile Cary crept back towards the clearing where the coals still blinked sleepily.

Slipping into the long lean-to he deftly began to saddle and bridle two of the best outlaw horses. This done, he glanced about and rejoiced to find a second haversack of food slung on a broken branch and also a greasy, wide-brimmed hat. He commandeered these, then cast loose the remaining horses, but they, probably afraid of the panthers which still roamed this range, would not run away, and lingered on the scene.

Leading the two saddled animals and praying they would not snort or dance, Cary returned to the glen to find Lenore Duveen no longer clad in her cumbersome wide skirts, but looking marvelously lithe in a pair of gray cavalryman's breeches and a shell jacket of the same color.

Silently Cary nodded his satisfaction and then indicated the quieter of the two beasts, and was delighted at the ease with which this amazingly self-contained girl got into the saddle. Still on foot, he was feeling his way down the one crooked trail which led from the valley when a loose horse must have trod upon some half concealed jayhawker. Even as the fellow's startled shout rang out, Cary vaulted into the saddle and urged his horse ahead. Now sounded the loud snorting and trampling of the frightened beast and the sound of voices thick with sleep. The fire blazed up and both fugitives violently kicked their mounts forward.

The horses, however, were very loath to leave their fellows and the

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grain bags in the clearing; they moved away so unwillingly that Cary, in desperation, pricked his beast a little with the point of Archer's bowie. At the sting of the steel the horse lurched suddenly, crashed into a holly thicket and made such a racket that instantly furious yells made the pines echo—"Thar they go! Thar they go! Quick, we'll git 'em yet! They cain't get out o' the valley!"

"Stay close—no matter what!" Cary shouted while dashing ahead to find the trail. It was a hard, punishing task, for low sweeping branches lashed his face and shed icy showers of rain drops over his chilled body, but, skilled campaigner that he was, he managed to pick a course down the hillside.

They had ridden thus perhaps five minutes when Cary reined in with a suddenness that made the girl's horse come bumping into him. Her pale face loomed near. "What is it?"

"Horses on the trail below—not sure though—you listen, too."

"Yes, I hear them. Oh, dear, what are we to do? Listen, Archer's men are coming after us!" And indeed the mountain above them resounded to muffled yells and pounding hoofs from which Cary estimated that at least eight or ten jayhawkers had captured their animals and were probably riding bareback in pursuit.

The burning question, however, concerned those horsemen below. Were they Confederate regulars or perhaps a wandering detachment of Federal cavalry cut off from General White's retreating army? Or were they more guerrillas homeward bound from a raid? In any case the situation was desperate, Cary realized, for at this point the trail followed the narrow crest of a ridge which fell away so sharply to either side as to make it suicidal to risk sliding to safety.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Aërial Trappers

AËRIAL trappers are helping ranchers in the West to rid their ranges of coyotes, bobcats and gray prairie wolves with ski-planes easing their work.

Armed with shotguns, young hunters patrol the air over snow-covered prairies in search of coyotes, valuable for their pelts as well as bounties. The aërial hunters swoop down upon their prey, giving it both barrels, and are able, by virtue of skis attached to their landing-gear, to land, load the carcass into the plane, and go on with the hunt.

In spite of sub-zero weather the aërial pilots are able to bag twelve pelts in a couple of hours' flying, if they have good luck—and good pelts are worth around five dollars apiece. The coyotes, which are preying upon cattle and deer, make huge depredations each winter among the young deer, calves and other animals.

The number of coyotes, cut down in one section, increases in another and thus the range pests continue to exist out West, and like the proverbial wolf at the door will no doubt always cause ranchers to worry—in spite of the modern aërial trappers.

Glen Perrins.

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KENNAN
In Siberia
THE TELEGRAPHER WHO TURNED EXPLORER
George Kennan, explorer, traveler and author, was born in Norwalk, Ohio in 1845. He came of Scotch-Irish and American stock, and was a distant relative of S.F.B. Morse, inventor of the telegraph. The trend of his career was determined when as a child he ticked off his first message over the newly invented marvel of wire communication. From that day no toy could interest the boy as much as his key and wire set.
KENNAN WAS ONLY 12 WHEN HE BECAME A REGULAR OPERATOR AT NORWALK. HIS ABILITY WON HIM PROMOTION TO POSTS AT COLUMBUS, WHEELING AND CINCINNATI. TO MAKE UP FOR THE SCHOOLING HE HAD MISSED HE LITERALLY BURNED THE MIDNIGHT OIL PURSUING STUDIES. IN 1863 KENNAN, DISAPPOINTED BY FAILURE TO SEE SERVICE IN THE CIVIL WAR, UNEXPECTEDLY REALIZED HIS DREAM OF SEEING THE WORLD. RECEIVING A WIRE FROM HIS SUPERINTENDENT INQUIRING: "CAN YOU START FOR ALASKA IN TWO WEEKS?" KENNAN CLICKED BACK THE IMMEDIATE RESPONSE, "YES IN TWO HOURS!"
THE FIRST ATLANTIC CABLE HAD JUST BROKEN SO IT WAS PLANNED TO SET UP AN "OVERLAND" TELEGRAPH LINE VIA ALASKA AND SIBERIA TO EUROPE. KENNAN, SCARCELY 18, TOOK UP A MISSION FRAUGHT WITH SEVEREST HARDSHIPS AMID THE WASTES OF UNEXPLORED SIBERIA. BECAUSE OF THE SUCCESS OF THE 2ND ATLANTIC CABLE THE PROJECTED LAND LINE WAS ABANDONED. BUT IN THE 2 YEARS PASSED IN THE SIBERIAN WILDERNESS KENNAN AND HIS PARTY BLAZED A 6000 MILE TRAIL. THEY OFTEN CAMPED IN 50 BELOW ZERO; THEY TRAVERSED GREAT RIVERS IN SKIN CANOES AND CROSSED TRACKLESS PLAINS ON REINDEER BROKEN IN FOR MOUNTS. HE WINTERED IN ST. PETERSBURG AND MASTERED THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE.

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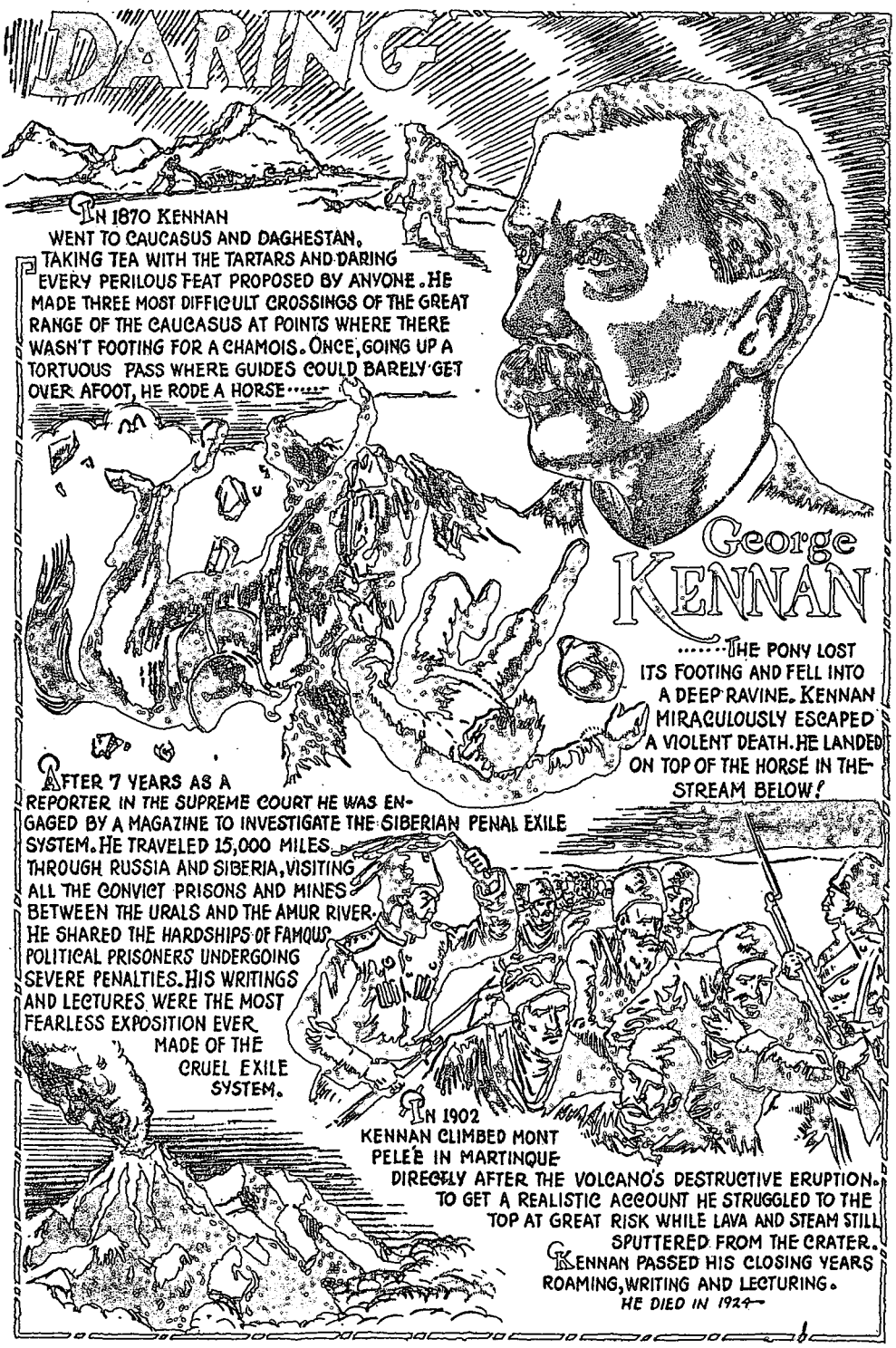
DARING
IN 1870 KENNAN WENT TO CAUCASUS AND DAGHESTAN, TAKING TEA WITH THE TARTARS AND DARING EVERY PERILOUS FEAT PROPOSED BY ANYONE. HE MADE THREE MOST DIFFICULT CROSSINGS OF THE GREAT RANGE OF THE CAUCASUS AT POINTS WHERE THERE WASN'T FOOTING FOR A CHAMOIS. ONCE, GOING UP A TORTUOUS PASS WHERE GUIDES COULD BARELY GET OVER AFOOT, HE RODE A HORSE.....
George KENNAN
.....THE PONY LOST ITS FOOTING AND FELL INTO A DEEP RAVINE. KENNAN MIRACULOUSLY ESCAPED A VIOLENT DEATH. HE LANDED ON TOP OF THE HORSE IN THE STREAM BELOW!
AFTER 7 YEARS AS A REPORTER IN THE SUPREME COURT HE WAS ENGAGED BY A MAGAZINE TO INVESTIGATE THE SIBERIAN PENAL EXILE SYSTEM. HE TRAVELED 15,000 MILES THROUGH RUSSIA AND SIBERIA, VISITING ALL THE CONVICT PRISONS AND MINES BETWEEN THE URALS AND THE AMUR RIVER. HE SHARED THE HARDSHIPS OF FAMOUS POLITICAL PRISONERS UNDERGOING SEVERE PENALTIES. HIS WRITINGS AND LECTURES WERE THE MOST FEARLESS EXPOSITION EVER MADE OF THE CRUEL EXILE SYSTEM.
IN 1902 KENNAN CLIMBED MONT PELÉE IN MARTINQUE DIRECTLY AFTER THE VOLCANO'S DESTRUCTIVE ERUPTION. TO GET A REALISTIC ACCOUNT HE STRUGGLED TO THE TOP AT GREAT RISK WHILE LAVA AND STEAM STILL SPUTTERED FROM THE CRATER.
KENNAN PASSED HIS CLOSING YEARS ROAMING, WRITING AND LECTURING.
HE DIED IN 1924

Next Week: Sergeant Major Daniel Daly—"Devil Dog Dan"

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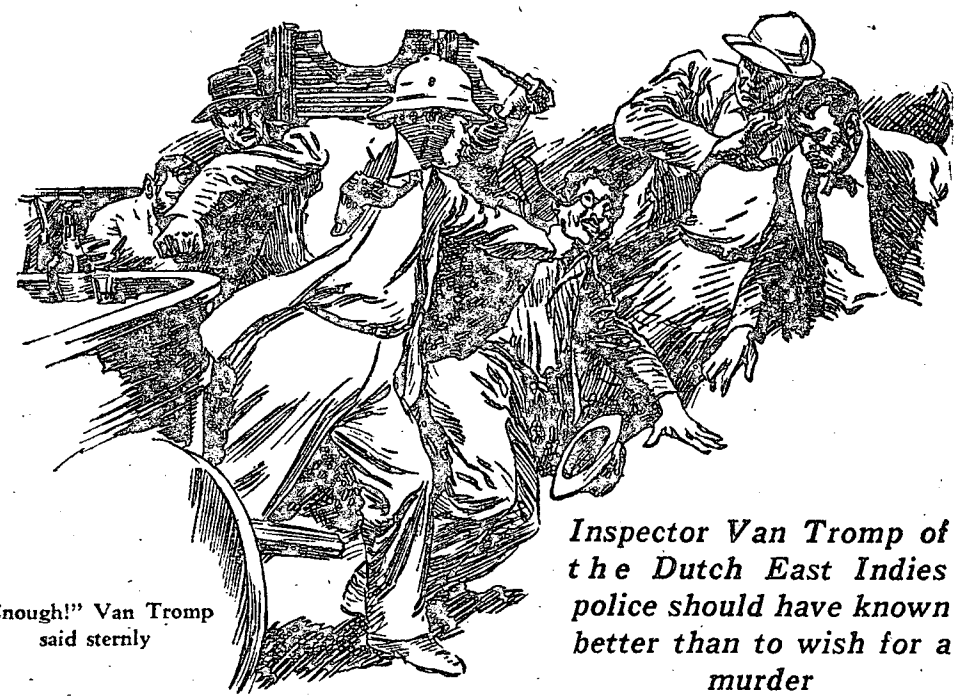
The Double Dutchman

By R. V. GERY



"Enough!" Van Tromp said sternly

Inspector Van Tromp of the Dutch East Indies police should have known better than to wish for a murder

MYNHEER INSPECTOR CORNELIUS VAN TROMP of the police was taking his sundowner in the club veranda when De Groot appeared.

The Inspector had been talking to Hogan of the bank. "Almighty!" he said. "Who would be a very-damned policeman?"

"What's the trouble now?" said Hogan, a trim, precise little fellow with a great reputation for refusing loans—the reason, maybe, why the careful Dutchmen had made him manager of their branch bank. "Restless again?"

"Trouble!" Cornelius snorted, rolling his hard blue eyes in mock passion. "The trouble is there is not any trouble! *Allerjezus,* all day I sit upon my stern in my office and scratch my head because Jan has stolen four gilders, or maybe Prang Yok the Malay ran away with his neighbor's wife. Almighty, they are—how do you say?—pikers! I look for a murder—a fine big murder!"

Hogan laughed. He was an American, but between him and the stocky Inspector there existed considerable affinity; they were both men of very definite notions of their own importance in the field of things.

"Don't want much, do you, Cornelius?" he asked. "I'm sure I don't know who's going to oblige you out of this lot. How about George Cockran there? Think he's the type, eh?"

He indicated a man standing at the

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bar with a suggestive row of empty glasses in front of him. He was a small, dark fellow, with somehow a faint suspicion of Eurasian about him —his dress was slovenly, and a casual onlooker might have said he was on the way to going native, the white man's last degradation in these climates. With the rest of his attire, he had the single peculiarity of wearing a gold-rimmed monocle on a broad black ribbon.

Van Tromp glanced across at him and his maroon face clouded.

"Cockran?" he queried thoughtfully. "*Na*, I do not think so, my friend. But I think this—another little while of such foolishness, and we have a burying. I am not opposed to liquor, as you observe," the bright eyes twinkled, "but Almighty! enough is enough!"

Hogan nodded. "It's a darn shame, Cornelius!" he said. "George there'll kill himself in no time at all at this rate. Look at him now!"

Cockran was obviously in for a high, wide, and handsome splurge. He was offering to stand treat to all and sundry, and downing jolts of neat spirit at a rate that made even the bartender open his eyes. His voice, slurred and pugnacious, floated out into the veranda, and Van Tromp's expression of doubt increased.

"*Ja!*" he said. "A burying!"

His expression suddenly altered, and he looked out into the road with a chuckle.

"Aha!" he said. "See who comes!"

Four stout coolies had just staggered to a halt below them, carrying a slung hammock. Out of it, bit by bit, and as if endlessly, rolled a colossal man —seven feet if an inch, with shoulders like a barn door, an immense paunch, and the long, prehensile arms of a gorilla. He had a great moon of a face, with a wide, rather vacuous smile distending suety cheeks and he waved a spade-like hand at the veranda.

Van Tromp waved back. "Our excellent Salomon De Groot!" he observed. "Now we see some drinking, eh?"

The banker did not seem altogether impressed. "H'm!" he said. "D'you set much stock by that fellow, Cornelius?"

Van Tromp shot a quick glance at him.

"So?" he inquired. "And you do not, my friend?"

Hogan merely grimaced, as De Groot went ponderously to the bar, his size increasingly obvious as he did so. There must have been all of three hundred and fifty pounds of him—mere bone, muscle, and fat. In a voice singularly small and piping for his size he called for *schnapps*—the fiery Hollands Geneva.

"The bottle!" he said.

ALMOST automatically the barman thrust a full one towards him. De Groot picked it up in his immense paw, jerked out the cork, and applied the neck to his wide slit of a mouth.

"Hog!" said Hogan under his breath.

The Inspector nodded slowly. "*Ja!*" he said. "Wonderful, no? But this Salomon here can stand it — for ten years he has been so. He is not George Cockran, eh?"

He was not, and Cockran appeared to know it. He was staring through his monocle at De Groot.

"S-say!" he jerked out. "That'sh new one, Salomon ol' son! Bottlesh, eh? Hey, bartender—gimme a bottle!"

He pulled a fat roll of currency out

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of his pocket and banged it on the bar, so that the notes went flying in all directions.

"S-set 'em up!" he gulped. "B-bottles for every one! Let'sh see you fellas drink!"

There was a general stooping among the men at the bar to pick up the bills, and a laugh. Van Tromp heard Hogan mutter, "You fool!" and glanced inquiringly at him.

"Legacy!" Hogan's lips hardly moved. "From home—paid him this morning. Nineteen thousand gilders!"

It was Van Tromp's turn to purse his lips. "So?" he said.

Cockran was vainly trying to persuade the barman to serve him liquor in carload lots, as it were, while the others were opposing the proposition. The enormous De Groot leaned back with his elbows hooked to the counter, and an amused grin on his vacant slab of a face. The notes, a whole litter of them, lay on the mahogany, apparently uncared for; and Hogan got up with a sudden exclamation of annoyance and thrust his way forward.

"Here!" Cornelius heard him say. "You'd better let me look after this for you, George!"

Cockran whirled on him.

"Hey!" he said angrily. "You let that alone, Hogan, d'ye see?"

The banker looked at him in surprise. "Don't be a fool, George," he said soothingly. "You come on home—you've had enough!"

Something in Hogan's tone seemed to flick Cockran on the raw.

"Enough?" he shrieked. "Who d'ye think you are, Hogan—shkinflintin' moneylender!"

"Steady there!" Hogan said; and Cockran rushed at him, fists flailing and with a torrent of abuse. The affair was so sudden that none of the bystanders moved to stop him; but Van Tromp, who had been watching matters with lynx-like attention, had darted across the floor and seized Cockran by the collar before he could do more than clapperclaw at Hogan.

"Enough!" he said sternly. "What is this?"

He held Cockran in a grip of iron, while the little man writhed and twisted and mouthed obscenities. He was fairly frothing at the mouth, and all at once he whipped a hand behind him.

"Look out!" some one called, but much too late. Van Tromp had swung his free fist like lightning in behind Cockran's ear, and he dropped to the floor as if poleaxed. The Inspector stooped over him and wrenched a murderous-looking little Malay *kris* out of his hand.

He weighed it in his palm in the midst of a great silence.

"*Na, na, na!*" he said. "Not here, my friend—not while I am Van Tromp! To-morrow you will be very sorry for this."

He looked about him. "Will some one take him home?" he asked. "No, not you, mynheer Hogan—it is possible he might recover too soon . . ."

De Groot advanced. "Let me!" he suggested, and picked the limp body up as if it had been a feather. "He will not stab me!"

"Hardly!" said Van Tromp. "I am obliged to you, Salomon. Put him to bed and tell his boy to look to him. In the morning he will be well—and then I have a word to say to him. Knives, eh?"

He slipped the little thing into his pocket and watched the gigantic De Groot striding up the road with Cockran in his arms. Hogan touched him on the shoulder.

"I'm going home to dinner, Cor-

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nelius," he said. "How about joining me?"

VAN TROMP bowed jerkily from a non-existent waist. "A pleasure!" he said with the charm of manner that had served him in so many tight places. "It is a little — warm here, no?"

Together the two men left the club and proceeded along the sea road to Hogan's bungalow under the trees. As they went, and at the meal that followed, they spoke of many things—the inside gossip of Van Tromp's wide district, seasoned and illuminated by Hogan's knowledge of men's affairs. But mostly the talk swung to Cockran.

"You did a good job of work tonight, Cornelius!" Hogan said. "Might jar young George out of some of that nonsense of his. He'll be dead meat in a month, the way he's going on."

"*Ja,* I think!" said Van Tromp. "He is not Salomon De Groot, eh?" He flicked another of his lightning glances at Hogan.

The banker shook his head. "He's not!" he said briefly. "I like little George—knives or no knives!"

Van Tromp did not even raise his expressive eyebrows at the implication. "Ah?" he said. "And what have you against our excellent Salomon, my friend?"

Hogan looked uncomfortable. "Sorry, Cornelius," he said. "It's confidential. Business stuff—I've been having quite a few interviews with Mr. De Groot lately, and—well, maybe he isn't altogether the expansive gentleman he seems to be."

Van Tromp chuckled. "*Ja* — the Double Dutchman!" he said. "In more senses than one, perhaps?"

"Where'd you hear that name for him?" Hogan seemed surprised. "I didn't know it had got about. It was George called him that himself—"

"Almighty, yes!" said Van Tromp. "That George will get himself into trouble yet with his tongue, as well as with little knives!"

He drew the *kris* out of his pocket and began to turn it over in stubby fingers.

"A nasty toy!" he said. "I shall, of course, confiscate it. I will not have such matters here."

The banker took it from him. "You can give it to me if you like, Cornelius," he said. "I collect these things, you know. There's a caseful over there."

Van Tromp laughed. "*Ja!*" he said. "You shall have it, William. At any rate I do not think you will cut any throats with it, no? More likely you will use it to skin some unhappy debtor alive, I believe!"

Hogan grinned and put the knife away. Then he turned to a small safe in the corner.

"I'd better put that young fool's money away," he said. "He'll be round to-morrow with a thick head and a sad tale of woe, and I'll have to give it back, I suppose. Infernal shame, all the same!"

Van Tromp sighed. "*Ja!*" he said. "A shame! Ho-hum! Who would be a very-damned policeman?"

IT was midnight when Van Tromp left Hogan's house and walked back to his own quarters. To do so he had to pass the club, and he paused a moment, listening to the noise and laughter that emerged from its windows. A door opened and a figure came out—there was no mistaking its mighty lines.

"Aha!" Van Tromp called. "You are still here, Salomon, eh?"

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De Groot crossed the veranda, making it creak under his tread. "Still here," he said, looking down over the rail at Cornelius. "But I am going home—to bed."

"Excellent!" said the Inspector. "And Cockran? You saw him settled? I have a word for friend George to-morrow — and *allerjezus!* more words for some people who permit him to swill as he does . . ."

De Groot seemed not to hear the gentle hint. He spoke in a cautious undertone.

"Cornelius," he said, "I do not think it was wise of Hogan, taking George's money. With you it would have been another matter—but between George and Hogan there is small love lost, eh? Remember this evening?"

Van Tromp assumed his most professional air.

"You have any suspicions to tell me, Salomon?" he asked.

De Groot backed down hastily. "No-o!" he said. "Only I—I do not think it was wise of Hogan . . ."

"I thank you, Salomon!" said Van Tromp, not without a shade of irony. "I shall remember you warned me. And now you are going home, eh? Well, I will walk with you."

The two men strolled homeward together, De Groot's shadow grotesque in the moonlight. At his house Van Tromp left him, and went to his quarters alone; he was more than usually thoughtful for some reason or other, and he was still ruminating as he put his light out and composed himself for sleep.

It was well after sun-up, and Van Tromp was vigorously splashing his hard, muscular body with cold water, when there came a quick knock at his door.

"Come in!" the Inspector called.

Sergeant Meintjes — his second-in-command, factotum, and in some respects complementary spirit—thrust a respectful face round the jamb.

"A killing, mynheer!" he announced, much as if he were reporting a fine day.

Van Tromp stopped splashing and glared at him over a bare shoulder.

"Eh?" he asked. "Who?"

"Mynheer Hogan of the bank," said Meintjes stolidly.

"His throat is cut."

It took a lot to startle Cornelius. He reached for his towel.

"A cup of coffee, Meintjes," he said. "And wait."

Five minutes later, in uniform and of official port, he entered Hogan's compound, with Meintjes at his heels.

"What is it, Meintjes?" he asked, as the stout constable at the door moved off post to let him in.

"Murder, mynheer," said the sergeant without the flicker of an eyelash. Van Tromp clucked with his tongue and thrust his way into the room.

The little banker was lying on the bed, and as Meintjes had stated his throat was cut from ear to ear. There were no signs of a struggle—it was obvious that he had been killed while asleep.

Van Tromp glanced about him for an instant, and then swung on the constable.

"Your report?" he snapped.

The man saluted. "Mynheer," he said, "the *khansamah* called me. I found this, and notified Sergeant Meintjes."

"*Ja!*" Van Tromp nodded. "And the *khansamah?* Where is he?"

Sergeant Meintjes pushed open the door into the living room—the room in which Hogan and Van Tromp had sat smoking and talking until a few

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hours ago. There was a trembling Malay there, handcuffed. Van Tromp scowled at him.

"Speak!" he said.

The *khansamah* told his tale, which was a simple one. He slept in a hut at the foot of the compound. That morning he had come up to prepare his master's bath.

He had found this, just as the sergeant had. That was all.

Van Tromp had been shooting quick little glances about the tragic room. He did not appear to have been listening very intently to the butler's recital. Now he turned to Meintjes.

"Verify that he slept in his hut," he ordered. "Hold him here meanwhile. You, Petrus, on duty at the door. I have a private business here."

The two policemen and the much relieved *khansamah* withdrew, and Van Tromp stood for a second motionless as the door closed behind them. Then he advanced with his silent, padding tread, picked up a small object that lay half-hidden by the valance of the bed, and examined it as it glittered in the palm of his hand. A vertical little wrinkle denoting perturbation appeared on his brow, and his lips puckered into a silent whistle.

"Hum!" he said to himself.

He went to the glass case of Malay knives and peered into it intently, his face darkening as he did so. Then he pushed open the door into the other room, and at once his expression grew even graver. The safe in the corner was ajar, with the keys dangling in the lock; and the nineteen thousand gilders were gone.

GEORGE COCKRAN was lying across his bed when Van Tromp and Meintjes entered his room. He was an unlovely spectacle in the bright light of morning, and Cornelius regarded him with some distaste.

"Meintjes!" he said quietly.

"Mynheer?"

"You have handcuffs?"

The sergeant produced the pair he had recently removed from the *khansamah's* wrists.

Van Tromp flicked a finger mutely at Cockran.

"*Ja*, mynheer!" said Meintjes, and clicked them on.

At the touch of cold steel, Cockran stirred with a groan and much mumbling of sticky lips.

"What the devil—" he murmured thickly, striving to free his hands. He sat up all of a sudden and blinked at Van Tromp.

"Here, I say!" he protested. "What's all this, Cornelius? A joke? You're not—you're not arresting me?" He began to fight, almost hysterically, against the irons, until Van Tromp thrust him backwards gently.

"Quiet!" he said. "And answer me, George. Where were you last night — after Salomon De Groot brought you home?"

"Where?" Cockran asked confusedly. "Why, here of course—that is ..." He broke off suddenly as if at a recollection.

"Yes?" said the Inspector in a tone of inquiry.

Cockran leaped to his feet all of a sudden. "What's it all about?" he babbled wildly. "What's the idea? Take these damned things off me — take them off!"

He began to wrench at his wrists again, but Van Tromp checked him with decision.

"Enough!" he said. "Stop it—and tell me if you left the house last night."

Something in his manner acted like

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a cold douche on Cockran. He sat still.

"What's up?" he asked. "You'd better tell me—"

"When you answer my question," said Van Tromp implacably. "Were you here all last night?"

Cockran looked him in the face. "I wasn't," he said. "I suppose the next thing is, where was I?"

"Proceed!" said the Inspector.

"Not on your life—if I'm under arrest," said Cockran, with a hint of a lopsided grin. "I'm being careful!"

"Arrest? Who spoke of arrest?" said Cornelius impatiently. "Meintjes, take those things off! Now," as the sergeant did so and Cockran's hands fell free, "where were you last night, George?"

Cockran moistened his lips. "Well, if you must know," he said, "I went round to Bill Hogan's place—"

"For what?"

"Do I have to tell you that?"

Van Tromp thrust his hand in his pocket. "No!" he said. "Unfortunately I know, George. Look!"

He opened his hand, displaying the small object he had taken from Hogan's floor.

It was a gold-rimmed monocle, with the torn end of a black ribbon hanging from it.

Cockran stared. "That's mine!" he said. "I lost it yesterday evening somewhere. Had it in the club there . . ."

"Sufficient!" Van Tromp put up a hand. "I arrest you for the murder of William Hogan! Meintjes!"

Cockran gasped, swallowing convulsively. "M-murder!" he stammered. "Hogan? Bill Hogan murdered?"

Van Tromp waved his hands in a gesture of dismissal. "Not now!" he said. "All that comes later. Take him away, Meintjes!"

THE sergeant tapped Cockran on the shoulder, and was leading him, apparently in a kind of daze, to the door, when Van Tromp appeared to recollect something.

"Wait!" he said. "Where is the money? We had better take care of that for you, eh?"

He was watching Cockran narrowly, but the other replied without a quiver.

"Money?" he said. "Why—yes, maybe you had. Here—it's in my pocket."

Cornelius had so far been the official incarnate—stern, impassive, collected.

At Cockran's words, however, he positively jumped.

"What did you say?" he demanded.

"It's here," said Cockran again. "Bill Hogan gave it back to me last night."

"He — gave — it — back to you?" Van Tromp's face was a study. "You saw him, then—you confess it?"

"Of course I saw him! Didn't I tell you I went round to his place?" Cockran was almost petulant. "Matter of fact, Cornelius, I went round there to give him the hell of a lambasting, if you want to know. I was mad, I guess, because he took it off me—the money, I mean. Only Bill had me in and gave me a drink—and we talked things over a bit—and well, there you are! That's all I know."

Van Tromp sat down on the bed. "What time was this, George?" he asked in a peculiar voice.

"What time did you leave him?" Cockran answered. "I saw you there, and waited till you'd gone. Around twelve, I should say."

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"And you left this there — in his bedroom?" Van Tromp held up the eyeglass.

"That? Why, no!" Cockran appeared surprised. "I'd lost that before. I hadn't it when I went out—"

Cornelius looked at Meintjes and Meintjes at Cornelius.

Then the Inspector turned to Cockran and began ticking points off on his fingers.

"Listen to me," he said seriously. "This is a bad business for you, George. You are under arrest, you comprehend, for the murder of Hogan. His throat was cut while he slept, after I left him last night, and before breakfast time this morning. Yesterday you quarreled with him, and threatened him with a *kris*—which I took from you. Under his bed, George, is found your monocle, with the ribbon broken. Hogan took your money from you to keep—his safe is opened with his keys, and you have the money. What do you think, George?"

"I didn't do it!" said Cockran. "I swear I didn't! He was all right when I left him."

Van Tromp sighed heavily. "*Ja!*" he said. "So I suppose. Well, take him away, Meintjes—we look into this affair. Come back to me!"

Protesting in a creaky voice and with his eyes staring, Cockran was led off. Van Tromp remained sitting on the edge of the bed, lost in thought. Abstractedly he pulled out a cheroot, lit it, and began to smoke.

He was still puffing when Meintjes returned.

"All correct, mynheer!" the sergeant reported.

"He said anything?"

"Nothing, mynheer—except that he is innocent."

Van Tromp removed the cheroot from his lips, put his hands on his knees, and regarded Meintjes with his heavy bull's stare.

"Well?" he demanded.

Meintjes shoved his uniform cap back from his forehead and scratched his bullet head.

"*Na,* mynheer!" he said finally. "I think not! It is not he!"

"Who, then?"

Van Tromp was in the habit of using Meintjes's mind as a kind of mirror to reflect a case in and study it so. He jumped, therefore, from point to point in his questionings, without ruffling its serenity by asking unnecessary things.

Meintjes shook his head now, however. "*Na,* I have nothing, mynheer," he said.

"Then let us see a little," said Van Tromp, and rose. Together they walked out of the house and into the street, where there was already a subdued excitement noticeable.

GROUPS were gathered here and there, and watched the Inspector and his satellite with respectful curiosity. Van Tromp strode purposefully towards the Hogan house, until he was stopped by the sight of De Groot's hammock coming lurching along the road towards him.

"A moment!" said Van Tromp to Meintjes, as De Groot's great face protruded over the side.

"A terrible business, Inspector!" said the big man. "Terrible!"

"*Ja,* it is bad!" Van Tromp shook his head.

"It was Cockran, eh?" De Groot asked, not without a spice of I-told-you-so malice. "I saw him under arrest."

"It looks very black," Cornelius admitted. "I should have listened to you, Salomon, eh?"

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De Groot smiled complacently. "Perhaps," he said. "It seemed to me obvious, my friend. Well—he hangs, I imagine."

Van Tromp swiftly grew official. "As to that," he said stiffly, "I do not know, Salomon. Not yet. But rest assured that if it is murder—and that we do not know so far—some one hangs! I am not Van Tromp of the police for nothing."

De Groot collapsed at once. "I am going to the club," he proclaimed. "It is early for a *stengah* yet, of course—but this news ... You will join me, Cornelius?"

"Thank you, no, Salomon!" said Van Tromp. "I am a little busy. I shall be seeing you, no doubt?"

"Naturally," said De Groot. "I am not easily missed, eh?" He shouted to his coolies and went off chuckling while Van Tromp and Meintjes headed for the house of tragedy.

Once there, the Inspector set about making necessary arrangements for the removal of the body.

When that was done, he turned to Meintjes again.

"Now!" he said. "We see! Your views, Meintjes!"

The sergeant had been preternaturally silent, even for him, ever since they had entered the house. Van Tromp had not addressed a word to him, but left him to wander moodily here and there, poking, prying, while the heavy-footed constables attended to essentials. It was an old game of the Inspector's and the sergeant's—and one that had brought downfall to a number of very surprised criminals.

Meintjes stood in front of Van Tromp, and said two words, slowly and distinctly.

"The knife!"

"*Ja!*" Van Tromp registered approval. "Of course. Where is the knife?"

Again Meintjes spoke laconically. "The chair, mynheer!" he said.

Van Tromp stared this time. "Eh?" he asked, almost testily. "What chair is this?"

The sergeant's eye wandered to a bent-wood affair against the wall. "That one, mynheer," he said. "Broken."

Van Tromp went and looked at it. It was true enough—one of the curved legs had been splintered, and the thing rocked crazily on the other three. He tested it, and turned inquiringly to Meintjes.

"Well?" he said.

"Mynheer," Meintjes said, "it was Hogan's chair. And Hogan was not a broken-chair man—"

Van Tromp seemed to catch the scent. "Aha!" he said. "No, he was not. I cannot imagine him enduring a broken chair ten minutes longer than was necessary. Therefore—"

"This chair was broken last night, mynheer."

"That is very possible," said Van Tromp gravely. "But how? And who?"

Meintjes bent over it. "How, is easy, mynheer," he said. "Some one stood on it."

He pointed to the varnished wicker seat, and Van Tromp thrust his nose close to it.

"*Ja,*" he said, after inspection. "That is so. But why does a man stand on a chair?"

"To increase his height, mynheer."

Van Tromp stepped backwards and looked up at the walls. "Go in the other room, Meintjes," he said. "There is a chair there. Bring it."

The sergeant did so, and Van Tromp mounted cautiously aloft. He extended

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his arms to their full length above his head.

"Hum!" he said dubiously. "No, I touch nothing but bare walls. You, too, Meintjes," he grinned at the stocky sergeant, "are not so much longer. Well—what now?"

Meintjes had also been peering aloft. "There is a ledge there," he said, pointing to where the match-boarding ceiling was set into the thatch roof.

Van Tromp measured the height with his eye. "Almighty!" he observed. "Eleven to twelve feet, eh? Let me see—a foot and a half for the chair leaves ten—ten feet up? Meintjes!" He suddenly whipped round to the sergeant and his eyes were bright as stars. "A ladder—a ladder! Quick—and let no one see you with it!"

GEORGE COCKRAN languished in durance vile that evening. In town, talk buzzed, and he was hanged fifty times over before dark. Even the normally sphinxlike Van Tromp confessed himself persuaded, although darkly enough.

"It is very unfortunate," he said. "I do not see—I do not see how we can escape the evidence . . ."

He had dropped into the club again, where a group of men were talking in subdued tones. Little Hogan of the bank had been a favorite, for all his tightwad complex—even those whom he had most emphatically turned down were genuinely shocked. Inexplicable, the general trend of thought said. Unheard of—but nevertheless there, in all its ugliness. Murder.

"Drink?" some one suggested. "D.T.'s?"

Van Tromp was talking quietly to De Groot. He looked over his shoulder.

"No!" he said. "Unfortunately not—I do not think so. I wish I did."

"Then what the devil was it? Little George—cutting a fellow's throat while he was asleep. It's all wrong!"

Van Tromp frowned. "*Ja!*" he said with a shade of irritation. "And there is something else wrong, too, mynheers. There is nineteen thousand gilders missing—"

"Missing!" The word was jolted out. It came from De Groot, whose normal slightly stupid placidity had left him entirely. He heaved himself to his feet, and stood towering over the Inspector. "Missing! But—Hogan had it!"

"Undoubtedly," said Van Tromp coolly. "He had it. But his safe has been burgled, and—we do not find it on George Cockran. It is very curious, that."

"What's he done with it?" The man who had spoken first fired this question. Van Tromp grimaced eloquently.

"Ask me!" he said. "How do I know—hidden it, eaten it, got rid of it. At any rate he has not got it."

"But—" De Groot commenced a sentence, and then stopped, as if thinking better of it. Cornelius glanced at him expectantly, but he ended with a lame "Nothing!" and took a deep draught of his liquor.

There was a commotion at the door, and a waiter came up to Inspector Van Tromp.

"Sergeant Meintjes, mynheer," he said.

The Inspector put his little glass down on the table and turned round with apparent annoyance.

"Almighty!" he said. "What is it now? Cannot a man have peace? Yes, Meintjes?"

The sergeant came quickly from the

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door and murmured something in his superior's ear. Van Tromp started.

"What is that you say?" he demanded. "Found? Where is it?"

Meintjes looked about him doubtfully. "If you would come, mynheer—" he suggested.

"*Goedverdom!*" Van Tromp jumped out of his chair. "What in the devil's name is this? It is here—it is not here—if I will come—if I will not come—Meintjes, you are a great fool!"

He swung round, glaring, on the others. "Almighty!" he said. "Let us see what this great booby has found. He says it is the knife!"

"The knife!" It was De Groot who spoke. "Where is it?"

"Let us by all means see, gentlemen!" said Van Tromp, leading the way to the door. "Come, Salomon, since you are interested!"

The whole group followed Meintjes to Hogan's house, and a hush fell on them as they entered the fatal little building. Van Tromp had not addressed a word to the sergeant on the way over, but once inside the place—

"Well?" he snapped in his most truculent manner.

Meintjes saluted. "Look up yonder, mynheer!" he said, pointing aloft.

THERE was a general craning of heads at the ledge under the thatching and Van Tromp grunted.

"Well?" he said again. "What is it?"

"Do you see anything?" Meintjes asked.

Van Tromp peered again. "*Allerjezus!*" he commented. "So there is! A handle sticking out! Mynheers, you see it?"

"Sure," said some one. "That's a *kris* handle, too!"

"*Ja!*" Van Tromp looked about him. "Meintjes, a ladder! Where is there one?"

"Across at the station," said the sergeant. "I bring it, mynheer!"

"At once!" snapped his superior, and Meintjes went out, closing the door behind him. Van Tromp cocked a speculative glance aloft.

"Hum!" he said. "That is very odd, no? How did that thing get there?"

"Probably got the ladder himself," was the suggestion.

"George?" somebody objected. "Not he! Catch him walking round with ladders at midnight. He's too small, anyway—"

Van Tromp was still measuring the space with his eye. "I wonder," he said, half to himself. "Suppose a man stood on a chair, now—could he reach that ledge? Almighty, we experiment! Who is tallest here?"

There was a general laugh at this, and Van Tromp set the sound chair against the wall. He mounted on it himself, stretching upwards. His fingertips were two good feet short of the ledge.

"*Na!*" he said with a laugh. "Salomon, do you try!"

De Groot had been standing by himself, a faint scowl on his great face. Now he hesitated, with Van Tromp's basilisk stare full on him.

"I do not think—" he began, and threw a look over his shoulder. At the movement a sudden icy chill seemed to take possession of the room.

"Up, De Groot!" Van Tromp's voice was all at once icy, too.

Very reluctantly, and with dragging feet, the big man clambered onto the chair, reached up, and took the knife.

"Well?" said Van Tromp, while the others held their breaths.

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A strange expression appeared on De Groot's face. He was looking at the *kris* with dropped jaw.

"This—" he said in a thick voice. "This is not the—not the thing that did it—this is not Cockran's knife—"

"Indeed," said Van Tromp quietly. "And what do you know so much of Cockran's knife, De Groot? Only for a second you have seen it in my hand yesterday?"

FOR an instant the huge man glared down at him, with every trace of color wiped from his face. Then with the roar of a bull he plunged to the ground, smashing the chair as he went, and made for the door. He flung it open, and staggered back. Meintjes stood there with leveled pistol, and behind him two constables with rifles. Van Tromp came quickly up and stuck his own pistol-muzzle into De Groot's ribs.

"Still—quite still, Salomon!" he said. "Meintjes, the handcuffs! De Groot, you are arrested for the murder of William Hogan!"

The enormous man stood for an instant as if paralyzed. Then he was down on his knees, manacled hands clasped before him, pattering out prayers and curses in a jumble inextricably mixed. Cornelius Van Tromp regarded him with contempt.

"Take him away!" he said to the sergeant. "George!"

The door of the inner room opened, and Cockran walked out of it, while the rest gasped. Van Tromp pulled out a roll of currency and threw it to him.

"There!" he said. "Another time do not be so foolish, my friend! Too many little drinks, *ja!* I have to take you in hand, I perceive—and there is the matter of carrying knives. A good fine I shall lay on you for that, rest assured. I will have no knives in my district—*na*, and no murderers, either, unhung!"

He swung about on the astonished group. "An explanation, mynheers?" he said with the shadow of a grin. "It is simple enough. This De Groot of ours was driven to the devil for cash—maybe you did not know it, but Hogan did, and Almighty, I also. George has nineteen thousand gilders—Hogan takes it from him, and quarrels, so doing." He shrugged. "What more simple then than for the clever, clever Salomon to slit Hogan's throat with George's *kris*—I gave it to Hogan and Salomon evidently found it here. That would place the blame on George for the murder and theft. But there was no theft. Almighty, I would have liked to see Salomon's face when he found the safe and the house empty of George's nineteen thousand gilders!"

He glanced about him, and up at the ceiling. "It was clever—too clever. Meintjes here observed the chair broken, and so was led to the ledge yonder where Salomon had left George's *kris*. That knife there, of course, was not Cockran's, nor did it do the killing." He fumbled in a table drawer and drew a bloodstained blade from it. "Here is what was at first up yonder. Yours, eh, George, my foolish friend? Here is why De Groot hesitated to climb—a little squeamish about what he knew was there. Observe, there is nothing to connect him with this knife, or any knife, except his reactions just now. He hangs, mynheers!"

He winked shamelessly.

"The Double Dutchman, *ja!*" he said. "Well, our little play-acting showed, maybe, that it does not need the height of a church steeple, or the

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weight of a river-horse to make a Dutchman double. There are some," he looked at the squat Meintjes and down at his own few inches, "who are perhaps double enough without all that!"

Once more he chuckled fatly, and led the way out of the building.

THE END.

Chinese Racket

THE Witwatersrand Gold Mines in the Transvaal, South Africa, in normal times employ about 240,000 natives. Directly after the Boer War the difficulty of keeping up this supply of native labor inflicted on Africa one of her most painful experiences. Natives usually work for six months, then retire for life, and the colored faction is forever changing. But the Boer War made things even worse. The natives were scattered, and labor agents had to go as far as eight hundred miles away in an effort to recruit new men.

In an attempt to fill in the ranks and keep the mines going, Winston Churchill, then a Member of Parliament, suggested the noble experiment. Millions of Chinese coolies were loafing and starving, he said. Why not import some of them?

Agents and well equipped ships were sent to China, and the agents did their jobs in the easiest way possible. None of them knew a coolie from a Manchu Prince. The moment they landed they sought interpreters, and went to the nearest Mandarins and stated their case. Could they have so many coolies for a term of three years? And at how much per head? The Mandarins were delighted. Surely they could have the coolies; and they could have them cheap.

A couple of months later the Transvaal mines discovered that the Mandarins had simply emptied all their prisons and put their convicts aboard their ships, and the mines were now taking care of them and feeding them!

For three years the Transvaal had fifty-five thousand Chinese thieves, murderers, bandits, garroters, torturers and every other species of criminal on their hands. And for the whole three years almost one-third of them were in jail. It was nothing for a band of them to break out from a mine compound, pick out a suburban house, put out outposts and attack it in a military fashion. Then they would torture and murder the men, assault the women and kill them, rob the place and burn it down.

Strenuous measures were of no avail whatsoever. Lashings such as would have killed any white man did not even daunt them. Barely a day passed without one or more executions for murder. On one occasion I saw six Chinamen hung in one batch in the Pretoria jail. Incidentally, the prison warders afterwards got into trouble for selling Chinese coolie pigtails as curios.

Finally the Transvaal gladly shipped all that remained alive back to the land they had come from.

Ferdinand Berthoud.

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The White Indian

By MAX BRAND

Author of "The Longhorn Feud," "The Masterman," etc.

It was Wind Walker — riding the White Horse

Red Hawk, the White Indian, knew that soon he must fight his last battle with the white man who was his greatest enemy

THE CHARACTERS.

RED HAWK, who was born RUSTY SABIN, and who has always been known as the White Indian to the Cheyennes who had adopted and raised him.

RICHARD LESTER, a friendly lawyer who lives in the white settlement of Witherell.

MAISRY LESTER, his attractive daughter, whose kindly, sympathetic attitude toward the White Indian during the year that the latter spent in Witherell, made him her slave for life.

SPOTTED ANTELOPE, Red Hawk's Cheyenne foster-father.

LAZY WOLF, a friendly, shiftless white man who has long made his home with the Cheyennes.

BLUE BIRD, Lazy Wolf's daughter by an Indian wife.

STANDING BULL, Red Hawk's most loyal friend among the Cheyenne braves.

DULL HATCHET, the Cheyenne war chief.

RUNNING ELK, the Cheyenne medicine man.

WIND WALKER, the great white enemy of the Cheyennes — ever since the day when braves of the tribe raided his cabin, forced his wife to kill herself and stole his tiny son. Wind Walker's other name is Marshall Sabin; but neither he nor Red Hawk knows that they are father and son.

Wind Walker is now riding with the savage Pawnees, who are also old enemies of the Cheyennes. The Pawnees, headed by Wind Walker, had raided the Cheyenne camp and stolen many horses. To Red Hawk this was especially disastrous because Wind Walker had taken

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his White Horse. The Cheyenne warriors are now trying to track the Pawnees down, in order to wipe them out.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BRUTAL TALK.

EVERY day brought a forced march from dawn to dark. The dust kept twisting up in thin, acrid spirals. The sun pressed down harder and harder with the weight of its heat, wasting the flesh from the horses and thumbing out hollows in the faces of the riders. But they went on silently, enduring.

They traveled rapidly, but sometimes they seemed to Red Hawk like so many ants painfully crawling beneath the vast blue arch of the sky. He was not of them. When he looked at them, an odd chill worked in his blood and he feared that he had begun to observe them with the spiritless eyes of a white man. Even the leaders were a grim sight. Dull Hatchet was considered a fine figure among the Cheyennes. He was in the full middle-prime of life, when as a rule a white man is marked with some softness by the years. But Dull Hatchet had simply hardened in brutality. Even Standing Bull was no longer the handsome young hero of three years before. Lines had gathered about his eyes. The marks of savagery had collected about his mouth, though his expression could still soften when he looked at his friend.

Hard as the Cheyennes rode, Wind Walker and his Pawnees still receded safely before them, out of the plains and into the hills. And at last the pursuers had full sight of the Pawnees in a position which was so entirely safe that the Cheyennes could merely gather on a hilltop and stare down at the picture with greedy eyes.

Wind Walker had selected the camp, of course. His cunning appeared at once in the choice of the site, which was in the center of a huge bowl, with highlands scattered around it. A twist of water ran through the center of the bowl, golden in the evening light. A few trees and shrubs offered fuel, but there was not enough for shelter behind which the camp could be stalked. An attack would have to sweep over a mile of open country to get at those Pawnees. And though there were fewer of them than of the Cheyennes, such an attack would lead to a senseless butchery, with no hope of success.

In the midst of the Pawnee camp there was one figure of shining white that Red Hawk could not take his eyes from—the White Horse.

He said nothing to his companions, but rode straight down the slope. Standing Bull called out a word of warning; but the rest were still as Red Hawk advanced on his thin-shouldered mustang towards the Pawnee camp. He had left his rifle behind him, and he carried no other weapon except the knife with its sixteen-inch blade of fine steel.

As he drew closer to the enemy, he lifted his right hand, palm out, and so advanced the horse at a walk. The Pawnees stood up and stared at him. He was quite close when a voice yelled:

"The Red Hawk!"

A young brave snatched up a rifle and levelled it. Wind Walker spoke, and the rifle gradually lowered from his aim. That was how Red Hawk rode into the camp of the Pawnees. They were chosen warriors, every one of those roach-headed wolves of the plains, but great and grim as they were, young and old shrank back from

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the path of this famous Cheyenne medicine man with the white skin.

The White Horse neighed suddenly, and came charging through the group. The stallion followed Red Hawk, nuzzling at his shoulder. The horses neighed again and again, like a great deafening horn.

But Red Hawk could not take notice of the shining monster. He had to step forward as though he were unattended, not letting his eyes dwell on the bloody marks of the bit on the mouth of the great horse, no matter how his heart swelled. With straightforward eyes Red Hawk must approach Wind Walker.

THE white man stood with his hands on his hips, his hat off, his long hair pouring down over his neck in a dusty sweep. He said quietly:

"Well, Cheyenne? A good many of these Pawnee hands are aching to get at your throat. Is it wise for you to be here? Sit down and eat something—and smoke, and tell me why you've come."

Red Hawk ate with them, and wondered why the food did not choke him. He smoked of the pipe which was passed around the circle afterwards, and blew his portion upwards towards the bronze of the evening sky.

Red Hawk took care not to look back over his shoulder at the gleaming image of the White Horse as he said:

"There can be no peace between Wind Walker and the Cheyennes, but even the snake and the owl may live in one house and fair exchanges make both the traders rich. You have a horse, Wind Walker, and I have gold, which is the white man's god. Give me the horse and I will give you as much gold as you can lift from the ground. In the course of one moon, I shall bring the gold to an appointed place and take the horse. Do you listen?"

"As much gold as a man can lift?" said Wind Walker. He gathered his brows and considered Red Hawk. "How many traders have you murdered, then, Red Hawk?"

"The great spirit, Sweet Medicine, struck the ground before me, and the gold lay at my feet," said Red Hawk.

He heard a little intake of breath as the Rawnees listened, but the white man was smiling.

"Well," said Wind Walker, "if there were a thousand mule-loads of gold on one side, and the White Horse on the other, I would keep the horse. You know that there are a lot of good things in the world, my lad, but nothing that pleases me as much as Cheyenne scalps. And the White Horse will help to shorten my time between scalps."

The Pawnees looked silently at the ground. A guest ought not to be insulted and threatened.

Wind Walker's speech was so very bad that Red Hawk stood up. Behind him the White Horse snuffed at his hair and sent a tingle down his spine, but he could not notice the stallion even now.

"In the Cheyenne lodges," said Red Hawk, making his last appeal, "there are better things than gold. They are painted robes and new rifles and plenty of powder and lead. Name what you wish, and I shall bring you guns and robes and many bright new knives, and beads enough to cover a thousand pairs of leggins. I shall bring you, also, a whole horse-load of sugar and tea. That is a good price for the White Horse."

The Wind Walker merely smiled

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again and pointed. "You have a bellyful of meat and a brainful of smoke.—Go back to the other Cheyenne dogs. The day will come soon when I shall tie your red scalp to the bit of the White Horse — and make him like the smell of it!"

Incredulity came over Red Hawk as he heard the brutality of this speech. But he said, merely:

"Even in the tall sky there is not room enough for two eagles to pass, if they have strong hearts. We shall meet again."

Then he turned and went back to his mustang. The White Horse tried to follow. But many ropes snared him. He began to kick and plunge. As Red Hawk rode off he shuddered, forcing himself to keep from turning. But it seemed as though the rawhide ropes that restrained the stallion were searing his own flesh!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"COME IN!—ENEMY!"

THREE days later the Pawnees vanished from the hills like a thin cloud from beneath the hot face of the sun. Dull Hatchet could find only the general direction of the flight. The reason of it was clear enough. No doubt Wind Walker had kept the band together all this time in the hope that the Cheyennes might walk into some ambuscade. Failing in that chance, the Pawnees had been sent off—the greater part of them, at least—to take the encumbering herd of stolen horses back to the Pawnee camps. They might return, then, and try to bait Dull Hatchet's band with a greater force.

The Cheyenne chief, learning how the many trails scattered to this side and that, picked out a northern landmark, a tall, bar-headed mountain. Then he scattered his entire troop, with directions to regather on the southern slope of the mountain. On the way, one of the men might pick up the trail of the scattered Pawnees.

That was how Red Hawk came to be riding alone on his scrawny down-headed mustang, through the narrows of a great defile. The sun was directly overhead, scalding him, when he heard a dull, bumping sound, and the horse dropped flat on the earth beneath him. An instant later the report of the rifle came welling down into the cañon as Red Hawk rolled away from the body of the dead mustang and into the shade of a bowlder.

Over the edge of that bowlder he looked up and saw the silhouette of the White Horse, racing on the verge of the cliff against the sky, with Wind Walker sitting huge in the saddle. The White man-slayer thought, no doubt, that the fall of the horse was what had flung Red Hawk out of the saddle and behind the barrier of the rock. Perhaps he was looking now for a way to ride down the rough sandstone steps of the side of the valley, and so get at his victim.

Then Red Hawk's whistle, that had called the White Horse many times, went up thin as the scream of a hawk. He saw the sound strike the stallion. He saw the shining form whirl and leap from the top ledge to a lower level, and again to another narrow platform of rock. Down came the White Horse, with Wind Walker struggling vainly to arrest that descent. It was all the rider could do to keep his place.

Red Hawk, his heart filled with laughter, snatched up his fallen rifle and levelled it. He would not shoot

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until that target was so close that there was no danger of striking the horse instead of the man. Then, on the very lowest shelf of the descent, he saw Wind Walker slung sidelong from the horse. Down he came, his body spinning rapidly over and over, until he lay motionless on the red shale that covered the bottom of the ravine—And here was the White Horse, at last, with a thin cloud of dust sweeping behind him as he galloped to his master, a red froth flying back from his torn mouth and onto his chest and shoulders.

Red Hawk spoke one joyous word to the horse as he ran forward. Then he saw Wind Walker rise up from the ground. From a ragged tear in his scalp, blood ran down over one side of the white man's face. He staggered on uncertain feet.

Something in that gesture—the hopelessness of even those mighty hands warding away the flying bullet—made the heart of Red Hawk change. He remembered, suddenly, how once he had awakened from a deathlike trance and found himself outside Wind Walker's house. His life had been spared, then.

And so he stood back, his rifle ready, but grasped only in his right hand while with his left he stroked the quivering neck of the White Horse.

THE Wind Walker came suddenly to his full senses. He dragged the back of his hand across his face, and through the blood that was clotting on his forehead, he peered forth at his enemy.

"I was once in your hands," said Red Hawk. "Instead of killing me, you threw me out of your house. You let the life grow up in me once more. The Cheyennes have asked the spirits to let them have your scalp, but Sweet Medicine has given me back the White Horse, and that is enough to take, even from a great spirit, in one day. Farewell!"

He mounted the White Horse. He could not believe that he was riding deliberately away from the glory of killing that great foe of the Cheyennes.

When he looked back he saw Wind Walker in the same place, no longer staggering, but with fallen head, like one whose spirit had been overwhelmed. Yet they would meet again, and the next meeting would certainly be the end of their feud.

He felt no pride in that encounter. Chance and the White Horse had brought Wind Walker to his feet, and with a truly Cheyenne terseness he merely said to the others, that night at the camp:

"Wind Walker is still alive!"

His red brothers eyed the stallion with wonder, and said nothing.

THEY had entered now into a deadly game of tiger-hunt-tiger. Through a labyrinth of cañons, broken mesas, sharp-sided hills, the hunt continued.

But the patience of the Indians was soon exhausted, and one after another the Cheyennes melted away to return to the distant camp. At last there remained only a grim trio; men hard as metal and welded together like steel—Dull Hatchet, Standing Bull, and Red Hawk.

The Pawnees, they knew, had scattered also. There was only a small group of them remaining, but among those Wind Walker was sure to be found.

They were in the jumble of a gigantic "bad lands." Water flowed in most of these gorges only after heavy rains,

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when the erosion went on rapidly. During the rest of the year only the wind was at work, with its chisels of flying sand hewing the rocks and wearing away more rapidly the clay slopes.

Standing Bull said, "Here all the red tribes could be hidden so that even a hawk would have a hard time to find a single man. But we must search. Red Hawk, may your medicine be strong!"

Wind Walker hovered like a hawk in all their minds, night and day.

Dull Hatchet established a system that showed why he was war chief of the tribe. His method was slow, but it was sure. It consisted of placing one man on the highest eminence in sight so that he could act as lookout while the others scouted through the ravines below, ever and anon looking up towards their spy, who was ready to warn them, by signals, if he chanced to spot the enemy in the distance while they were working through the gorges.

It was slow, painful, and anxious work, and they spent days at it. The weather was hot and windless. No water ran in the little valley; only now and again did they find water—usually scummed across with green—from which they could fill their leather water bags. They never ventured to build a fire, for the least gleam at night might be enough to bring the enemy upon them, and the slightest trace of vapor during the day would be seen from afar as it stained that clear air.

Hence, for food they crunched parched corn and chewed jerked venison, washed down with the tainted water from the stagnant water-holes. Every day their bodies burned dry and their eyes sank back beneath their brows, wrinkled pouches of skin gathering around the lids.

Since the bright sheen of the White Horse began to seem like a shining light that would be sure to take the eye of the enemy from afar, his coat was smudged over with yellow and brown clay. Sometimes they even considered the possibility of turning the horses loose, so that they could do their work more efficiently on foot.

Altogether, they were in the bad lands seven days. And in the late afternoon of the seventh, Red Hawk made his way stealthily down the bottom of a dry ravine. For some time he had not looked back toward the lookout which Dull Hatchet was keeping from the top of a flat hill behind him. Coming to a stretch of still water that had not the least film of green over it, he tasted it. It was strongly alkaline, therefore he drank only sparingly of it. Nevertheless, it was time that the empty water skins were refilled, so he turned back to signal the discovery to the lookout.

Then it was that he saw on the top of the mesa, through the burning, golden haze of the slanting afternoon light, the brief and shadowy flickering of an arm. It said, almost as swiftly as speech: "Come in! Enemy! Come in!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THREE AGAINST THREE.

THE many days of hunting collapsed to a moment, only, on the instant that Red Hawk's eye deciphered that signal. He turned and ran back, his body bent horizontal and in his ears the imagined clang of a distant rifle, the thin whine of a bullet.

When he came to the foot of the mesa, Standing Bull and Dull Hatchet

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were already there, Dull Hatchet on one knee, loading his rifle. He had thrown off his deerskin shirt and flung away his leggins, so that he was in a breechclout only. To Red Hawk he looked the mightiest figure of a man he had ever seen. What was even Wind Walker compared with this copper-skinned giant?

Standing Bull, stripped to the waist, was hardly less imposing. What he lacked in height and weight, he made up in an appearance of greater agility.

Dull Hatchet stood up and pointed.

"Over there toward the hill with the two tops," he said, "there is a mesa with a flat top. On it I saw the shine of the sun on a medicine glass. It is a hunter, and the game he hunts is not deer or antelope or buffalo. He is hunting men!"

Red Hawk had quite forgotten the possibility that Wind Walker might have with him a field glass.

"We must go ahead quickly and carefully," Dull Hatchet continued. "The white man may have seen me wave from the top of the rock. He may be waiting with others, and they may be loading their rifles with new bullets and smiling at one another. Ahead of us, a little distance, there is another high hill that looks out on two cañons. Let us climb it. Tether the ponies to the White Horse, because he knows how to stand still."

"Suppose Wind Walker goes by us, following another ravine, and so comes out behind us and catches the horses," said Standing Bull.

"At a time like this," answered Dull Hatchet, "one stupid mind is better than three clever ones. I have thought of one way to try to fight them; but we have no time to talk about it. While we sit in a council, the white men are perhaps stealing towards us."

They did as he said, because the point of his last remark was perfectly patent. Standing Bull tethered the other ponies to the White Horse, while Red Hawk stood in front of the stallion and talked to him quietly, moving his hand back and forth across the eyes of the horse. When they had left, the White Horse stood fast, looking after them with his head canted a trifle to one side as though he strove to read the minds of these humans.

NOW the swift feet of the Cheyennes found the way down the cañon until they came to the foot of that hill which the chief had discovered before. All its lower slopes were deeply gullied red clay; above, there was a flat cap of rock, turreted like a castle, so that the place made a perfect citadel.

They climbed until they had reached an upper brow of the rock. There were other hilltops not far away from which they could be seen, and so they crawled to the forward edge of the big stone platform. Lying flat, over the edge of the rock he could see right down into the right-hand ravine where, coming towards them, were three men. He had a glimpse of one, then another, and another.

"Back! Back!" said Dull Hatchet.

They wormed back from the edge of the platform. Dull Hatchet was saying in a murmur, "Keep well in. From time to time I shall look over the edge of the rock. Did you see?"

"I saw the roached heads of the Pawnee wolves," said Standing Bull.

"Good!" said Red Hawk.

But to him Wind Walker was the great prize. When he thought of the fixed and savage light in the eye of the famous man-slayer, his breath left his body.

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Dull Hatchet went on, "There is a place where the ravine has no rough places — no brush, no rocks, and no hollows. If they cross that close together they will all be in sight at once, and we shall try to shoot. Keep close here to the edge of the rock. Have your rifles ready. When I give the word, be ready to push the guns over and fire. I shall take Wind Walker. You, Standing Bull, take whichever of the Pawnees is on the right. Red Hawk, take the man on his left."

RED HAWK had to remember that unless they took this advantage, now that they had won it, the enemy would be perfectly ready to slaughter them. The whole fame and name of Wind Walker rested on the fact that he fought Indians by the use of Indian methods. Only the direct interposition of Sweet Medicine had induced him to spare Red Hawk's life on that other day.

Another thing, however, suddenly began to beat in Red Hawk's temples. That was the memory of how Spotted Antelope had died, upon his lips a warning to his foster son never to harm Wind Walker. Some dread secret had been in the Cheyenne's throat, but death had choked it.

"Quick!" whispered the war chief.

Red Hawk raised himself on both elbows and settled the butt of his rifle against his right shoulder. Leaning his head to the right, he closed his left eye. Thus he looked down the sights over the rim of the rock, and saw beneath him the three men.

They had come to that bit of unsheltered ground. Off to their left was a deep draw, along its edge a scattering of brush. This would have given them cover, but their caution would have been more than human had they wormed their way through that jagged cut instead of taking the upper ground.

Even so, it was plain that the two Pawnees did not like this business of crossing open ground. Wind Walker's lofty, stately form strode along as though he had no fear of bullets, but the two Indians skulked forward, constantly edging toward the right, to get to cover again more quickly. They were both to the right of Wind Walker, for which reason Dull Hatchet corrected his directions rapidly, saying:

"Take the one nearest the side of the ravine, Red Hawk."

Red Hawk had the figure in his sights, an easy, point-blank shot. He could not miss, though for that rifle he had to allow of a bit of driftage to the left. He made that correction; but he felt that he wanted more time. He felt, somehow, that he had been hurried into this.

Then the man he covered looked suddenly up, froze in place, and the sun flashed on his arm as he pointed.

RED HAWK squeezed the trigger at the same instant. The rifles on either side of him roared in a double report even before his own weapon spoke. His Pawnee bounded into the air, turning round and round like a dancer. He landed in a heap, his arms sprawling out to either side, and lay still. Off to his left, the other Pawnee had fallen.

But Wind Walker had bounded to one side as the bullet struck him—or so it seemed—and had been caught in the brush at the verge of the draw. His broad hat could be seen there, at least.

Standing Bull's yell sounded far away in the ears of Red Hawk. "Sweet Medicine steadied our rifles!" he was shouting joyfully.

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"I go to climb the higher rock behind us," Dull Hatchet said. "From that place I can look farther and see if any other men are coming!"

He went back swiftly, calling over his shoulder the suggestion that the other two put at least one more bullet into each of the fallen men. Standing Bull hardly needed that cautioning. He had already loaded, well before Red Hawk.

"This for Wind Walker!" he said as he fired, and Red Hawk distinctly saw the hat in the brush move.

"Take your own man again!" exclaimed Standing Bull.

"He is dead," said Red Hawk.

Then he saw the second Pawnee, the one that Standing Bull had struck down in the first place, push himself up into a sitting posture and try to crawl away. But it seemed as though his legs were glued to the ground.

"I have him!" shouted Standing Bull, reloading again with flying hands.

"Let him be!" said Red Hawk. "Look! He is dying again. He is singing the death-song, brother!"

For up from the ravine came the small, wavering sound of the chant. By the pauses in it, it seemed to Red Hawk that he could count the pulses of agony, the dragging steps by which life departed from the wounded man.

"LET him die before his song is finished," said Standing Bull, and levelled his rifle once more.

Red Hawk grasped his arm.

"Let him die in peace," he urged. "If the Listeners Above wish to hear him, let him finish his song."

Standing Bull turned a convulsed face. "Are you a woman, still?" he exclaimed.

But turning suddenly aside, he took a fresh aim, and fired again at the broad hat which was stuck in the brush at the side of the draw beneath them.

To Red Hawk's amazement, that hat turned to the side, revealing the fact that there was no head beneath it; and then it dropped quite out of view.

Standing Bull grunted with alarm. "Suppose he was not killed, brother!" said he. "Suppose he leaped into the draw when the rifles sounded, and that Dull Hatchet missed him! Suppose nothing happened to him, except that his hat was stuck there in the brush?"

Red Hawk stared back at his friend. "Then," said he, "Wind Walker might still be alive and running up that draw or down it, unseen by us and ready to fire?"

Standing Bull nodded, and the two looked gloomily at one another.

"We must go back and tell Dull Hatchet," said Standing Bull; and rising, they hurried back to the rear of that shoulder of rock.

Above them rose the turrets another fifty feet or more.

"Do you hear? Dull Hatchet!" called Standing Bull.

"I hear! I hear!" said Dull Hatchet. "There are no others in sight. We may climb down to the valley now. Why have you left that Pawnee singing?"

"Because the heart of Red Hawk turned weak!" said Standing Bull, contemptuously.

It seemed, suddenly, that he had ceased to be the old friend Red Hawk had always known. Anger thickened his voice.

Still the chant of the dying man slowly mounted upward from the floor of the ravine.

"Wind Walker's hat has been knocked out of the brush by two bullets," said Standing Bull. "Perhaps

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he was not hurt at all, but only left his hat behind. Or perhaps he is lying dead in the bottom of the draw."

There was an exclamation from Dull Hatchet. "There is a bullet through his heart," he vowed, "unless the spirits turned it aside from his flesh.—Come, come! We must go down . . ."

His voice changed and rang out suddenly on a note of astonishment and fear. He had been looking down at them through an embrasure in the upper rocks. Now, as he whirled about, Red Hawk had the briefest glimpse of another figure with long gray hair blown over the shoulders, rushing in upon the Cheyenne chief.

In an instant they were out of sight.

"Wind Walker!" groaned Standing Bull, and began to bound up the rock like a mountain goat.

CHAPTER XXXV.

FATHER AND SON.

IT seemed to Red Hawk that two mighty spirits of the upper air were storming against each other high above his head, as he climbed. When he thought of the colossal bulk of Dull Hatchet and his fearless heart, he could not prefigure defeat for the Cheyenne. Yet when he thought of the charging form of Wind Walker, he could no more dream that that man was liable to fail.

With his loaded rifle under his arm, the climbing was slower for him than for Standing Bull, who had thrown down his empty gun and rushed like a hero straight for the battle, with only a knife for weapon. Still he was not far behind. And he had no fear.

That was why the foot of Red Hawk was lightened as he climbed the rock. He was close to the top, with the naked, muscular legs of Standing Bull flashing above him, when he saw the huge bulk of Dull Hatchet forced back to the verge of the upper platform. There he and the Wind Walker whirled for an instant, before the Cheyenne lurched suddenly outward, with a frightful yell. The shadow of his falling body rushed over Red Hawk. As he drew himself up onto the level of the rocks above, he heard the heavy fall below him, and the crunching sound of the breaking bones.

He had even time to wonder at the ability of Wind Walker—a walker of the wind, indeed, since he had been able to travel out of the draw and climb so quickly to take his enemies in the rear.

Then, as he got to his feet with his rifle, Red Hawk saw Standing Bull leap in with his knife at the enemy, regardless of the jagged fragment of stone which Wind Walker swayed in his hand. The stone moved as if for a blow; Standing Bull swerved to the side and ran in; and then the ruin descended fairly on his head. He went down without a cry, his great body flashing in the sun as he stretched out and lay still.

With some extra sense, though hardly with his eyes, Red Hawk saw this; for his real vision he was using to look down the sights of his rifle at the body of Wind Walker. The giant hesitated for an instant as though he knew that death was inescapable. Then, with a shout, though his hands were empty, he rushed straight forward to receive the bullet.

A red glory of admiration and wonder flowered in the brain of the younger man as he saw the veteran come in at him. He remembered, too, how he had once fallen before the gun of this hero—and had been spared. He could

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feel, in memory, the red-hot finger of the bullet that ripped the flesh along his head.

HE cast his rifle aside, and it fell with a loud clangor on the rocks. For if Sweet Medicine was in fact his protector, what did Red Hawk need of rifles? His own hands would be enough. He gave a wild yell and sprang to meet the charge, even forgetting the great knife in his belt as he reached for the enemy.

His hands grasped at a bulk which seemed to have ribs of rock. And as he dodged to the side, Wind Walker's grasp ripped the deerskin shirt from his back and flung him headlong, half stunned.

All that he knew was that a hand had grasped his long hair, and that he had been half raised so that his neck was bent back over the knee of the giant. One effort of that tremendous arm would shatter his spine. Against the flaring sunlight of the sky he saw the terrible face of Marshall Sabin, and out of the distance he heard the failing voice of the Pawnee raised in the death chant.

"Here!" said Wind Walker. "Here, you damned white-skinned red-hearted murderer of a Cheyenne! Tell me where you got this, and perhaps you'll have two minutes more to live, then you can sing your own death song.—Do you hear? Where did you get it?" As he spoke he lifted the green amulet.

Red Hawk's voice was strangled in his throat. Yet even now, in the whirling of his mind, he had time to wonder how even Sweet Medicine could save him now. But he said: "It has always been around my neck, ever since I was a small boy."

Red Hawk found himself lifted to his feet. One of Wind Walker's vast hands still grasped him by the hair; the other pointed over the edge of the rock.

"Dull Hatchet!" exclaimed the Wind Walker thickly. "That murdering devil of a Cheyenne butcher—he is with you to-day. Is it *his* section of the tribe that you've lived with ever since you can remember?"

"Yes," said Red Hawk.

Wind Walker's hands gripped him suddenly by the elbows, freezing every nerve in his arms to numbness.

"I'm going mad!" gasped Marshall Sabin. "God keep my brain clear!—Lad, are you half Indian and half white?—Was either your father or mother a Cheyenne?"

"No," said Red Hawk. He looked into the working face of the Wind Walker, and suddenly shuddered from head to foot.

"How long have you been with them? How long have you been with the tribe? Do you know that?"

"Seventeen — eighteen years," said Red Hawk.

WIND WALKER'S terrible hands released him suddenly. Red Hawk could have snatched out the long knife at his belt and buried it in the body of the white man at that moment, but he heard the giant cry:

"Remember exactly — for God's sake! Was it eighteen years ago?—Was it?"

"It was—exactly eighteen years," nodded Red Hawk. "I have heard them name the year when I was brought to the tribe. Spotted Antelope—"

The pointing, rigid arm of Wind Walker stopped him, the wild eyes that searched his face.

"You once sacrificed a horse on the grave of my dead wife, boy," said

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Marshall Sabin. "Why did you do that?"

"Because I heard a voice come out of her grave, one day a long time ago."

"What voice?—In the name of God, are you going to give me your damned Indian nonsense and spirit chatter now? What did the voice out of the grave say to you?"

"Only one word. It was as if I had remembered it out of some dim past. 'Rusty,' it said. I do not know why."

When a bullet drives straight through the heart, the flesh of the body quivers once and is quiet, and the breath may swell the throat and part the lips once without a sound coming. It seemed to Red Hawk that his last word had so struck through the body of Marshall Sabin and left him, in a moment, still and calm. His man-slaying hand stretched towards Red Hawk with the palm turned up.

"Rusty," said such a voice as Red Hawk never had heard before, "can you see with my eyes?—It was your mother's name for you, and you are my son!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SONG FOR THE MISSING.

THE death song of the Pawnee in the lower ravine had ended by now. Speech was rising with happiness and sorrow out of Rusty Sabin's throat, and still he listened to the voice of his father.

Standing Bull, however, stirred suddenly and rose. The fallen rifle was instantly in Marshall Sabin's hands, but Rusty said to him:

"This is my friend!" and instantly the mouth of the rifle pointed to the ground.

Somehow they got Standing Bull down the cliff to the ravine and to the horses, where with water from the water bags they washed his wound and bound up his head. He had heard the story, by that time, and when he had recovered from his astonishment enough to take his hand from his mouth, he said:

"Red Hawk, it is the work of Sweet Medicine! Our rifles were charmed. Our knives had not edges to strike into the flesh of Wind Walker. Therefore he was turned into your father so that he may do us no more harm.—What will you do?"

"I cannot take my father among the Cheyennes. Therefore I must go with him among the whites," said Red Hawk. "Dull Hatchet lies dead, but he died on the war path, as a good man should. You can count two coups, and you can tell the tribe that you have fought hand to hand with Wind Walker.—It is not a bad journey for you."

"Ah-hai!" said Standing Bull. "The tribe has lost the war chief, and I have lost my friend.—Do you tell me nevertheless to be happy?—Go back with me to our people, Red Hawk," he pleaded. "Tell them the truth. Otherwise, if I stand up among them and speak, they will never forget that I went out on the war path with Dull Hatchet and with the friend of Sweet Medicine. They will never forgive me. Bad luck will be seen where my shadow falls.—Come back with me, and say farewell to the tribe, if you must go!"

Even Wind Walker could understand the necessity for that journey, and so they headed slowly out of the hills and across the plains, letting the horses gather strength, and dressing the wound of Standing Bull every day so that only the scar remained when he reached the camp.

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Outside the camp, Marshall Sabin took the hand of his son and said:

"Is it safe for you to go in? The treacherous red devils may forget what you've been to them, the moment they learn you're my son. They may cut your throat for you!"

Rusty Sabin looked back into that grim face and answered very gravely, "My skin is white, and you are my father—but all my life the Cheyennes are my people!"

Marshall Sabin's big head wagged from side to side in wonder. He never would understand, Rusty could see.

Through the twilight, Red Hawk rode out of the hills with Standing Bull, and into the noise of the camp. He went swiftly, secretly, to his lodge, leaving Standing Bull to spread the news. And while Red Hawk stripped himself to the breechclout and painted himself blue and yellow, he heard the evening commotion as it swept in waves through the camp. Far away, he heard the yell of the mourning women begin; those were the squaws of Dull Hatchet, lamenting their dead.

He took special care, finally, in painting all across his breast the likeness of a flying owl, in red.

HE walked out to the great fire, stalking along behind his friend. Old Hopping Bird came out of a waiting cluster of people and threw herself down before him. Her grandson was dying, she said, unless help came to him from the Sky People. They had the boy there in a litter, and by the light of a torch Red Hawk could see the starved and wasted face. They pulled back the buffalo robe and showed the whole body, thin as a corpse that has dried for months under a parching sun. The lad was fourteen, and the frightful scars of the initiation had never healed perfectly. They stood up like red fists.

The poor lad was Gray Eagle, a famous name given to him by common assent of the tribe; not because he had as yet been able to do anything on the war path, but because the glory of his father must be kept in mind by every Cheyenne.

Gray Eagle's glazed eyes now shone with sudden hope. He smiled and lifted an uncertain hand toward the friend of Sweet Medicine. Red Hawk dropped to his knees; he laid his hands on the great knotted scars of the initiation. Then he felt something go out of him; he could feel virtue flowing down his arms and through his hands. Perhaps this would be his last deed among the Cheyennes. Words came slowly from his lips:

"Sweet Medicine is near me. I feel his breathing. His strength goes through me into the body of Gray Eagle.—Peace shall enter Gray Eagle's veins. Strength shall flow into him. He shall live!"

Hopping Bird gave a cry of joy. Red Hawk stood up. And he heard the boy muttering:

"It is true! I shall live.—I felt the life come into me when I heard the voice of the medicine man."

Red Hawk said, "What have you done for him, Hopping Bird?"

"All that the wise men advised. He has had a fever. We have given him sweat baths twice a day. We have carried him down and plunged him in the river afterwards, when he was too weak to walk. Still he grows weaker."

Red Hawk thought of the stifling steam of the sweat-house and sighed.

"Sweet Medicine has entered his body," he said. "Give him no more baths. Let him be very quiet. Hush the children near the tepee. Give him

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buffalo tongues and boiled corn—a little every day. In the morning and the evening, sing a chant to Sweet Medicine. You need not lift your voice very high; you will be heard."

Then he went away, and behind him he heard the people laughing with joy. And he heard the voice of the boy saying again:

"I shall live! I feel the strength in me!"

But the strength had run out of Red Hawk, and he was weak. His knees bent under him as he strode out into the light of the bonfire and saw about him, once again, the thick circle of the listeners.

As he dropped the robe from his shoulders a murmur rose. Hands pointed towards the painting on his breast. He saw a young squaw lift up her son so that the boy could see the prodigy.

"The sign of Sweet Medicine!" she said.

With his head thrown back, Red Hawk looked at the stars, and a great silence fell over the camp, except where the wives of Dull Hatchet lamented, far away. The voice of their grief entered rhythmically into him, and it seemed to be his own soul that was crying out.

AT last he said: "There is grief in me like the sorrow that puffs up the body of a small child. I must go away. My father waits for me; his blood calls to me. I go out among the white people.—I must eat their food, but the spirit behind my teeth will always be Cheyenne. Every day I shall turn toward you and pray to Sweet Medicine to give you happiness. The white people have given me a new name—but keep one place in your heart, and let Red Hawk be there. I hope the sadness that fills me now is a sorrow that I shall take away from the tribe. Sickness and famine, and the longing for peace; that is what I carry away. I leave joy behind me.—Let me touch all of you with my hands. Oh, my brothers and my sisters! . . ."

He could not talk any longer. He walked like a blind man, slowly, with Standing Bull at his side, guiding him through the crowd.

Then the Cheyennes forgot dignity to press in on Red Hawk and receive his touch like a benediction, and with every touch something more went out from Red Hawk, and the strange weakness grew in his knees and in his heart.

At the edge of the village the crowd halted as though at a wall. Only Standing Bull took three forward paces, and stood beside the sheen of the White Horse and the departing man. He gripped the hands of Red Hawk and repeated the old formula of the blood brothers:

"Your blood is my blood; my blood is your blood. Your life is my life; my life is your life."

Red Hawk spoke the same words. He could only whisper them.

When he had mounted, the White Horse seemed to understand, and went away on soft, careful feet. Behind them the tribe began to sing, with the great voices of men and the sweet voices of the women and children, the lament for the missing:

"One arrow—one arrow—one arrow . . .
One arrow has gone forth . . .
Return, O arrow! Return to me!" . . .

Red Hawk never once turned his head, but when the singing died away in the distance, it seemed to him that the night grew suddenly darker.

Presently, Wind Walker loomed out

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of the darkness and rode beside him and a little to the rear. Even the Wind Walker seemed to understand, for he was silent.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

TOWARD A NEW LIFE.

ON that long journey across the plains, bright and bare as the sea, the father and the son rarely spoke to one another. They were constrained and self-conscious; they used towards one another a scrupulous politeness.

Sometimes, when Rusty Sabin looked at his father, he felt a sudden sting of pity in his eyes. For he could feel that the mere fact of blood had made Marshall Sabin love him, and in his own heart he was sure that he never could feel a natural affection for Wind Walker, the slayer of his red brothers.

Yet it was Rusty who stopped, on the way down Witherell Creek, at the obscure ruins of the shack; and it was Rusty who dismounted from the White Horse and stood beside the white grave stone. Then he told his father how he had first found the place.

Marshall Sabin pulled off his hat. He was perfectly calm as Rusty talked about her. All the way across the plains the elder white man had not once mentioned his dead wife, but only now was Rusty conscious of the omission.

He heard how Marshall Sabin, on that day those years ago, had left the small house and the cornfield, and how he had returned in the dusk of the day to find his house was half wrecked, his cornfield trampled as though by blind beasts, and on the earth floor the body of his dead wife.

"But there was no pain in her face, Rusty," said Marshall Sabin. "She looked even younger than she had when I married her. And it must have been because of that look on her face that the Cheyennes did not scalp her. She had long red hair, Rusty, the same color as yours. Yet they hadn't scalped her," he repeated.

"And you were gone.—Of course I thought you were dead. I kept on thinking that till I saw the green beetle hanging from your neck the other day. She used to wear that beetle on a cord that passed around her hair. It looked pretty there—the green against the red."

It seemed to Rusty Sabin that there was not enough air in the world for him to breathe. When his mind cleared, afterward, it was as though the Cheyennes had withdrawn to a distance. Yes, it was as though the great red tribe had been seen marching off into the horizon, with the White Indian, Red Hawk, among them.

Looking into Marshall Sabin's face, so marked by the long years of pain, he saw the Wind Walker no longer. In his place was the big-shouldered, fearless young man who had leaned over his dead wife in the cabin with terrible resolves growing up in his brain like the smoke of a sacrificial fire.

"I pick up these years one by one," said Rusty at last. "I put them behind me. I begin again at that time when you came home and found the empty house, father."

They left at once, and rode on towards Witherell. They could talk, now. There was that matter of the gold, about which Marshall Sabin was naturally very curious, but the mention of it brushed a swift shadow across the face of his son.

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"I have turned my back on my people. They are lost to me," said Rusty sadly. "Do not ask me to send my thoughts back to them for the sake of gold."

Marshall Sabin said no more. He permitted the conversation to run on to the subject of the girl, a theme that grew like a river in flood, with Rusty talking. And it did not fail until, in the dusk of the day, they entered the town and came to the house of Richard Lester.

"GO in to them, father," said Rusty. "I am ashamed to see them because they know that I have offered them money and that I come for the girl, to make her my squaw. Talk to them, and then let me know what they say."

Said the father, "I know a good deal about this thing. Lester has talked to me because he knows of the night you came to my house. He will let the girl be as free as the wind. She may do as she pleases."

"Good!" said Rusty. "But since her father is sick and her mother is weak, he must come with us. And you, also, my father. Because of her parents, we must go to a southern land, where there is more sun and where the wind cannot blow cold. Only go in quickly and speak to them. Tell the girl that the White Horse is here, and that I am waiting with the horse."

Marshall Sabin, for a moment, rested his hand on the shoulder of his son. Then he strode up the path and passed around to the rear of the house. Rusty heard the knock of the hand against the door, the creak of the hinges, the sound of voices, the shutting of the door, and silence again.

His mind went back to the tribe, to the gleam of the campfire on the many wild faces, to the singing lips in the chant, and to the sheen of eyes, and to the honor which was now his among the Cheyennes.

Then, listening closely, he could hear inside the house his father's deep, swelling voice. He heard tingling outcries break in upon that voice, but he gave little attention to them.

AT last the deep voice paused, and presently the front door of the house opened. He could not see who came down the steps; in his ears there was a mighty rushing, like the thunder of a cataract in the Sacred Valley that the White Indian had heard.

Stepping back, he leaned his right arm up on the neck of the stallion. Then a hand touched him.

"Rusty!" said the voice of Maisry Lester. "Come into the house!"

He closed his eyes.

"No," said he, "because you have come to stay with me—forever."

If she stepped back now, he felt, she was lost to him. So, with his eyes still shut, he put out his left arm, found her, and drew her in close to him. Then he opened his eyes. She had said nothing, because she needed to say nothing. Neither of them moved. But Rusty felt that they were rushing together, out of the world of flesh, and that they were sweeping through a measureless domain of the spirit.

He took one of her hands in his and felt its smallness, its warmth and strength. It seemed to fit exactly his grasp, as though he could compass her, body and soul . . .

THEY sailed on the next river steamer that left Witherell. The plan was to take Richard Lester as quickly as possible down the Mis-

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sissippi to New Orleans, and then trek westward into the land of bright skies and little rain about which Rusty had often heard.

It was easily arranged. That gold which Rusty had brought in had, in fact, almost the power of a god; and it enabled them to start at once on the journey. On the day when they sailed, the entire town knocked off work to see the departure, and there were cheers when the White Horse went up the gangway with dainty steps, shuddering as he found himself above the strip of water, and making a final spring onto the deck that sent out a sound like a great drum beaten.

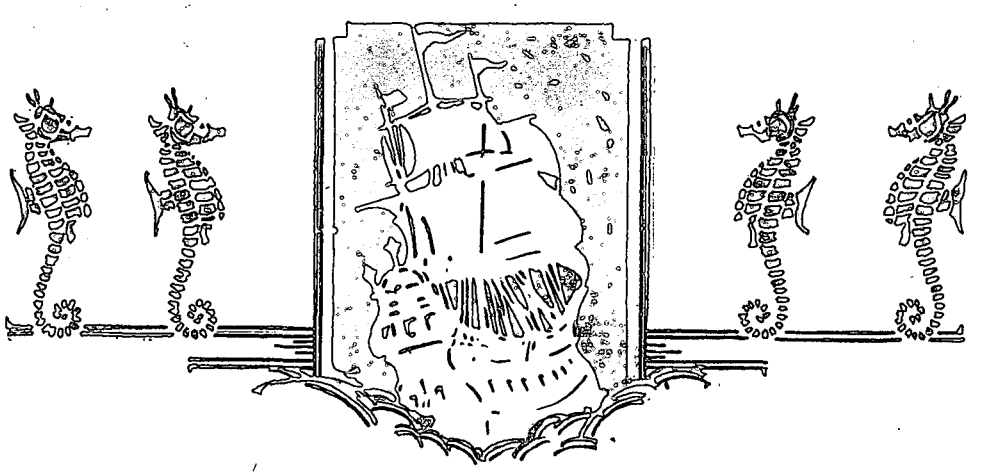
Rusty was busy quieting the horse. Later on, the stallion could be worked back to the stall that had been prepared for him. In the meantime, steam was gotten up and the ship began to tremble with the life of the raging wood fires that sent the sparks rushing high into the air and sent blazing cinders blowing out toward the dock. The horse stood with the people at the end of the deck, sometimes throwing up his head to look about him with terrified eyes, and again sniffing for reassurance at Rusty's face.

Mrs. Lester, in tears, was waving frantically to her many acquaintances. Richard Lester, a fragile form leaning on the arm of the gigantic Marshall Sabin, made an occasional gesture toward a friend. He was very happy; but even if he had been sad, the bursting joy of Marshall Sabin would have been enough to scatter the darkness from the mind of his friend.

The ropes were cast off. The stern paddle wheel began to groan and turn, dashing into the water. The sky began to move slowly overhead. The voices of the crowds died out. The great engine were carrying Rusty out toward a new life.

He looked toward the girl. She leaned against the rail, at a little distance. Her glance shifted slowly, calmly, from the White Horse to Rusty Sabin. She smiled a little. It was typical of her that she should stand there at a little distance, with the look of one who has plucked a wild bird out of the sky and has made it her own forever.

THE END.



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Grimly, Bill dropped the carnival passes into the fire

Good-by, Carnival

By JOHN H. THOMPSON

It began to look as if Beary's World Famous Carnival Shows wouldn't part with Jim and Bill for anything

BILL toyed idly with the saucer of breakfast food.

"I thought I was hungry, but this gol-dinged stuff makes me think of the sawdust in the sideshow tent," he grumbled. "I don't even want to be reminded of carnivals. I'm dog-goned sick of them!"

"Me, too," I interposed, making the vote unanimous.

"I'm glad we quit the show," declared Bill. "Seven weeks of it was more than enough. I'd reached the stage where even the sight of a shredded-wheat dress on a sideshow blonde made me gag. And every time I saw a roustabout or a ballyhoo artist I felt like pawing in the tool chest for a hammer with which to tap him on the head. I'm not going near a carnival lot this season!"

"The open road and a satchel of Higgins's Peerless Indian Oil would be good enough for me—if only we had enough money to buy the satchel and some empty bottles to hold the oil," I said.

Bill peremptorily beckoned to the waiter. "Say, bo," he queried, "is there any chance of a pair of good

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workers—me and my pal—horning in on a job here? You might give us a break, in view of the fact that we've spent seven weeks' surplus earnings here for food. We won't quibble over the pay. We're willing to leave that up to the boss."

Anybody would have said that the chances of picking up a couple of jobs offhand were rather slim, but for once we were dragging Lady Luck around by her golden tresses.

"The boss was just saying he had to hire a couple of dish swabbers for the day," the waiter informed us. "A big bunch is coming here for dinner. If you two want the jobs, I guess you're elected—providing you don't think that light pay and hard work are two lambs that can't gambol hand in hand."

"Any old gas pump looks good when the tank is empty, as Julius Cæsar chirped," said Bill.

"I'll speak to the boss about it," promised the waiter. "After you settle for these breakfasts," he added warily.

"Don't worry! We'll pay," chuckled Bill good-naturedly. "We've got half a dollar." He planked the coin down on the counter to allay suspicion.

The waiter disappeared kitchenward. He returned with the glad tidings that we could begin work as soon as the half-dollar had gone to roost in the cash register.

TEN minutes later, Bill and I were at the kitchen sink, tackling a stack of greasy dishes.

"It's a bum job!" sighed Bill. "Still anything that'll liberate us from the carnival business is welcome. I don't want to see a carnival outfit or speak to a carnival man for the rest of the season.—Why, if the owner of the biggest carnival in the country were to come and offer me a job as manager—"

"Don't worry, he won't!" I interrupted, scraping a slightly worn egg into the garbage pail.

But Bill was so light-hearted that he overlooked the reflection on his ability to grab something in a big way.

Swabbing down the kitchen floor was on the program of events for the morning, but by the time Bill and I had unwrapped the parings from a bushel of potatoes, there wasn't time to do any floor swabbing. This curtailment of the program, however, didn't cause us to do any sobbing.

"This bird must be planning to entertain the Irish army," sighed Bill as the last mangled potato was tossed into the greasy boiler.

"Look what Washington did at Valley Forge!" I pointed out. "What General Bullinsky did at Warsaw! What—"

"What in heck has that got to do with our peeling a bushel of potatoes in a second-rate restaurant?" demanded Bill, testily.

"Nothing," I conceded, "except to demonstrate the high price of freedom.—Both us and the potatoes must suffer if you and I are to be liberated from that dog-goned carnival. If—"

"Say, you two guys. Get out in front there and arrange the sugar bowls and salt cellars over the spots on the tablecloths," directed the boss. "We're having a high class outfit to dinner here to-day."

The spots on the tablecloths outnumbered the sugar bowls and salt cellars three to one, but we did the best we could. We were still working on that complicated puzzle when the boss set us to work scraping down the walls. He was so particular that we began wondering if perhaps the Civic Purity League wasn't going to gather around the trough for its annual banquet.

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He wouldn't even let us be out in front when the guests were due, lest the spots on our vests cause somebody to raise a squawk. We were in the kitchen, therefore, when we heard the advance guard edging up to the trough.

"HOLY mackerel, Jim! Do you hear what I hear?" demanded Bill hoarsely as the sound of voices percolated through the clouds of greasy smoke in the kitchen.

"It sounds like the bearded lady from over at the lot," I gasped.

"And that's the voice of the calf-faced boy, or I'm a liar!" declared Bill. "Hey, you!" he demanded, turning to the cook. "Who's this bunch that's tucking napkins under its chins here to-day?"

"The carnival crowd—over here for a banquet," said the cook.

"The carnival crowd!"

Fortunately, Bill was leaning against the wall at the moment, otherwise he might have toppled over.

He turned to me in disgust. "What d'you know about that, Jim?" he groaned. "We took this job to get away from the danged old carnival—for four hours we sat here inhaling grease and peeling potatoes—and who for?" He spread his hands in a gesture of despair.

"Be calm, Bill, old man!" I pleaded. "Remember, after we get paid to-night we can shake the dust of the carnival off our feet for the rest of the season, and head for the next town."

I finally succeeded in cheering him up a bit.

The pie plates were just beginning to percolate back to the sink when word came that the cook was wanted out in front. He hurriedly reversed his apron, brushed his shoes with a dish-towel, and disappeared through the swinging door. A muffled burst of applause trickled through.

"It sounds as if they're pleased," said Bill. "If they hand out any bonuses in this joint, I hope they don't forget the guys who nicked the black spots out of the potatoes. A bit of loose change on top of our pay for a hard day's work would help a bit, even if it comes from the carnival.

The cook returned, beaming. "Something for everybody," he chuckled, assuming the air of a department store Santa Claus doing his stuff for the juvenile barnacles on cash customers.

There was a rustle of paper.

"Bank notes, eh?—not l o o s e change?" I remarked appreciatively.

"Here you are!" said the cook.

Bill and I gazed in dismay at the pieces of paper he thrust into our hands. They were two passes apiece for Beary's World Famous Carnival Shows!

"HEY, you idiot, what are you doing?" demanded the cook in angry amazement.

Bill had grimly lifted the lid from the stove and dropped our four passes into the fire. Then he brushed his hands as though to remove possible contamination.

"What—?" began the cook.

"They were *our* passes, weren't they?" demanded Bill coldly. "We let you hand them to us, but we don't have to use them."

He picked up the dish swabber and resumed the attack on the stack of plates.

The cook spent the rest of the afternoon muttering disagreeable things under his breath.

It was dusk when the last plate had been dried and stacked and the last odds and ends of broken glass had been

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removed from the sink and deposited in the garbage pail. The cook had long since departed. So had the boss—both, presumably, for that accursed carnival. The counterman was there, however, conversing with three late customers who were lapping up coffee at the counter.

"Now for the old mazuma that'll make us forget that we've peeled a bushel of potatoes for the carnival crowd, and that'll help us to get out of reach of that dog-goned outfit," chortled Bill gleefully. "Old Lady Luck has lacerated our feelings, but a few hard-earned dollars will be salve for the wounds."

We tackled the counterman.

"Well, buddy, we're through," Bill informed him. "It's been a tough day's work. How much do we get?"

The counterman wiped his hands. "Two dollars apiece," he said.

"That's fine—bully!" declared Bill, approvingly. "Four dollars in cash will take us a long way from here."

"It isn't in cash," said the counterman.

"Not in cash?" echoed Bill in dismay.

"Nope. The boss left these for you." He handed each of us a little pad of papers. "Two dollars' worth of carnival passes apiece," he explained.

Even the three cash customers, deserting their coffee, couldn't hold Bill. Probably that was the reason why the counterman eased through the back door and summoned a policeman.

Bill was still dazedly babbling about carnivals as we were led into the police station.

"A COUPLE more toughs from that carnival, eh?" growled the desk sergeant grimly. "Well, we're going to break up that gang!"

"But, sergeant," I protested, visions of sixty days in jail floating before me, "we don't want—"

"Quit arguing!" interrupted the sergeant brusquely. "It isn't what you fellows want.—I tell you we're going to bust up that gang. Have you got any money?"

"Not a cent," I confessed sadly.

"I searched 'em, sergeant. They're broke," interposed our guard.

The sergeant hesitated for a moment. Then he reached for something in the desk. He fumbled, then produced a couple of pasteboards and held them out to the officer. Vaguely, I wondered if they were carnival tickets.

"Put these two bums on the Winsted bus," directed the sergeant. "Tell the driver not to let them off until they get to Winsted.—And remember," he added warningly to Bill and me, "if you come back to town and are seen within half a mile of the carnival grounds you are going to be run in as suspicious characters!"

I had the presence of mind to give Bill a vicious jab in the ribs. There are times when a misplaced grin of happiness might prove to be a monkey wrench in the machinery of justice.

THE END.

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The Men Who Make The Argosy

TIP BLISS

Author of "Three-Timed," "Dolls and Clowns," "Wilder Every Hour," etc.

TIP BLISS, like many another fine old Southern gemmun, was born and grew up, physically if not mentally, in the general environs of Boston, Mass. The exact date of his birth he is pretty touchy about making public, but suffice to say that in 1916 he was a grizzled war correspondent along the Mexican border for the war that never warred, and the next year enlisted in the U. S. Army to save something for something (the exact details forgotten) in the war that warred altogether too much. Of the two he prefers the former variety. In two brief years he soared to the rank of sergeant, and still stands on that record. His chief military glory is that he is the only enlisted man alive who never had a chance to turn down an offer of a general's three stars. He prefers the Hennessey variety.

He would never have become a writer if he had known anything about piano tuning, and he wouldn't have piano tuned (and never did), if he had been acceptable as a sword swallower, buck and wing dancer, doll's eye painter, bushelman or anything else. A lot of people say he isn't a writer either, but the devil with them. They ain't got no appreciation of *belles lettres*. (This includes editors of the Springfield *Republican*, Hartford *Courant* and *Times*, New York *Mail*, *Telegram* and *Mirror*, *Judge*, *Life*, *New Yorker*. You go on from there.)

He now lives in Coral Gables, Fla., where he drags down big royalties at the game of Sheriff Dodging. Each sheriff is allowed to throw three writs at him, and if no bull's-eye is registered, all debts are called off. This sport is now rivalling tobogganning and coasting down glaciers in Florida.

Mr. Bliss, bless his heart, hates to golf, but likes to fish; hates to dance, but likes to swim (except for the bother of getting all dressed again); won't learn bridge under any consideration, but will go on the cuff to any amount at draw or stud. Just an old-fashioned boy.

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Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

ARGOSY pays $1 for each letter printed. Send your letter to "Argonotes" Editor, ARGOSY, 280 Broadway, N. Y. C.

SHARES the *Roadrunner's* night vision:

Woburn, Mass.

Apropos of your story, "Night Birds," and the ability to see in the dark, I would like to remark that from boyhood up, I have always been able to see in the dark.

My mother would send me all over the house in the dark (at that time we used kerosene lamps in the country) and I never stumbled over anything and always brought her whatever she wanted or needed.

My fondness for the night without any light was remarked on quite often, and I would travel miles in the summer after school was over, either walking or on bicycle, always disdaining a lantern or any kind of light.

Am nearly fifty years old and although my eyes are somewhat weakened now from excessive use and study, I still have the same ability as proved by a recent visit. Rooming in a strange house, I would enter late at night and go from the front door to my room, down the hall to another room, and never touch or hit anything. The lady who owned the house made the statement that she could not see how I could do it without lights. I told her I could see all right. But she looked doubtful.

I wonder how many do have cat's eyes?

Have read ARGOSY over thirty years.

HERBERT TOTMAN.

FINE selection:

New London, Conn.

Ts-ts! J. K. must have Jack Pearl, our radio Baron Munchausen in mind. I enjoyed "Oklahoma Stampede" because it could have happened to any of us if we had lived or went West in those days.

Have been reading ARGOSY for thirteen years. Went looking for a magazine with a lot of reading for the least money. ARGOSY, on first glance, seemed to contain the desired variety, so I bought it. I was not disappointed. Have been buying it ever since.

I enjoy mystery and adventure stories most: *Gillian Hazeltine, Mme. Storey* and the amusing *Bella, Peter the Brazen* and *Susan,* though sometimes I have a terrible longing to wring her neck.

In fact, I like your ARGOSY as it is. The stories are not cheap copies, but a fine selection of the better stories in a digestible variety.

Have always admired Paul Stahr's covers. They are done in natural manner. The expressions are real and the colors not overdone.

Thanks a lot for many happy hours. ARGOSY gives me the travel and adventure I always wanted and never had.

ELEANOR A. SHERMAN.

TINGLE:

Morristown, N. J.

Karl Detzer's "Alarm" promises to be a corker, and "Clear the Trail" sure puts a tingle in your bones with Charles Alden Seltzer as its author.

Any author who can get a story in ARGOSY is a favorite of mine. Loring Brent's "The Sapphire Death" is just about all a story can be. Here's for more like it.

How about more stories about *Carson Napier* and *Gillian Hazeltine,* but please keep those damn cross-word puzzles out of ARGOSY and keep it a magazine, not a puzzle-book.

An interested reader, L. S.

QUILLS from the fretful porcupine:

Westport, N. Y.

This letter is written to "Argonotes" in the interest of all puppydogs of high and low degree, and is in the nature of an addition to the recent letter concerning porcupines from W. E. Harvey of Brookmere, B. C.

Nearly every dog brought up in the country, where dogs should be brought up, suffers at least once from porcupine quills. I never knew of a dog that had learned the trick of the fox, mentioned by Mr. Harvey, in killing porcupines.

The quills are usually in the dog's mouth, lips, and nose, which are extremely sensitive. The points of the quills buried in the flesh are barbed and if the quills are not removed they will work

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on in a more or less direct line. In one case a quill that we overlooked came out through the top of the dog's nose, a long time after it had gone into the roof of his mouth.

Ordinarily the barbed points of the quills make it extremely difficult to pull them out, but if the protruding ends are cut off with scissors the quills and barbs collapse to a certain extent and can be taken out with pliers with much less pain to the dog.

This is something that I did not know until quite recently and I am passing on the information in the hope that it will save many a poor pup the suffering that some of my dogs had to go through before they could be freed from the deadly quills, which may be fatal if they travel on into the brain or other vital part.

'Tis dogs' delight to bark and scratch,
And some enjoy their fleas.
But none is fond of hedgehog quills,
Or troubles such as these!

COON MOUNTAIN BILL.

FORTIETH year and still satisfied:

Cincinnati, Ohio.

This month makes the fortieth year that I have been reading your magazine. Back in 1893 I got a copy of *Golden Argosy* and became a reader of your magazine for life. In the attic back on the old farm many miles from here can still be found ARGOSYS of thirty-five years ago which have been read and reread many a time, by others than the original purchaser.

As long as they continue coining dimes I expect to have an ARGOSY every Wednesday.

I can't say that I like *all* your stories, but I read everything in every issue and certainly have never found less than a dime's worth in any issue. Am glad to have *Mme. Storey* back with us again, and hope to see *Gillian Hazeltine* with us soon.

I am partial to gangster stories and don't understand why some of your readers knock them, when the same knockers will scramble to get in to see a moving picture of the same thing.

"Men of Daring" is another feature which I hope you will not drop. I read quite a number of other magazines, but will take off my hat to ARGOSY every time.

Your staff of writers are all top notchers, and are all worth reading.

When any man makes a squawk about any of your stories, which he buys for a dime, he is either feeble-minded, or just naturally a grouch.

Good luck, and fifty more years of the same old ARGOSY.

C. H. KENWOOD.

Looking Ahead!

Frank L. Packard

Presents his annual mystery novel—a thrilling tale of intrigue and murder in the South Seas. A shipwrecked Malay leads the passengers aboard a millionaire's yacht onto a fatal treasure-hunt for

THE PURPLE BALL

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A dramatic long novelette of football and cadet honor—when West Pointers play the game.

By Lieut. John Hopper

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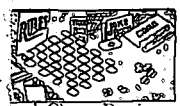

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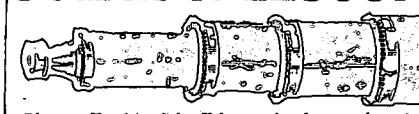

The new Excelsior Solar Telescope is a large and serviceable rately fitted. When extended it is almost three feet in length twelve inches in length. Telescopes of this size usually s importing them direct from a large European manufacturer customers for **ONLY $1.25** each, at which price they ough made, the sides are brass bound, and the four sections are pe obtain a Telescope for a nominal sum. It will be sent pos $1.25 in any convenient form. Postage stamps accepted if *of novelties, tricks, jokes, sporting goods, firearms, jewelry, no*

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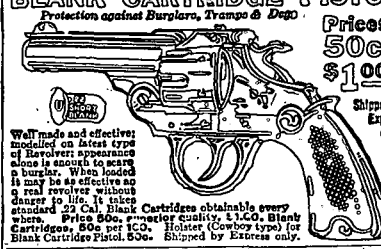

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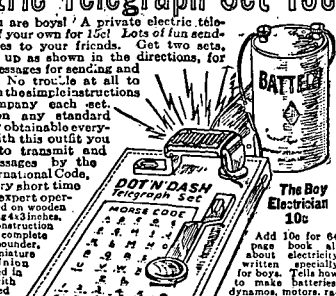

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